



ASTRO CITY

METROBOOK 1
KURT BUSIEK • BRENT E. ANDERSON • FLEX ROSS
BLYBERG • SINCLAIR • BUCCELLATO • COMICRAFT





ASTRO CITY[®] METROBOOK 1

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Originally Presented in
KURT BUSIEK'S ASTRO CITY #1-6,
KURT BUSIEK'S ASTRO CITY VOL. 2 #1-12
& WIZARD PRESENTS ASTRO CITY #1/2

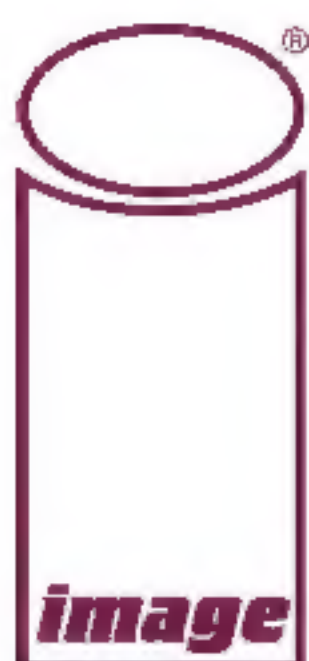


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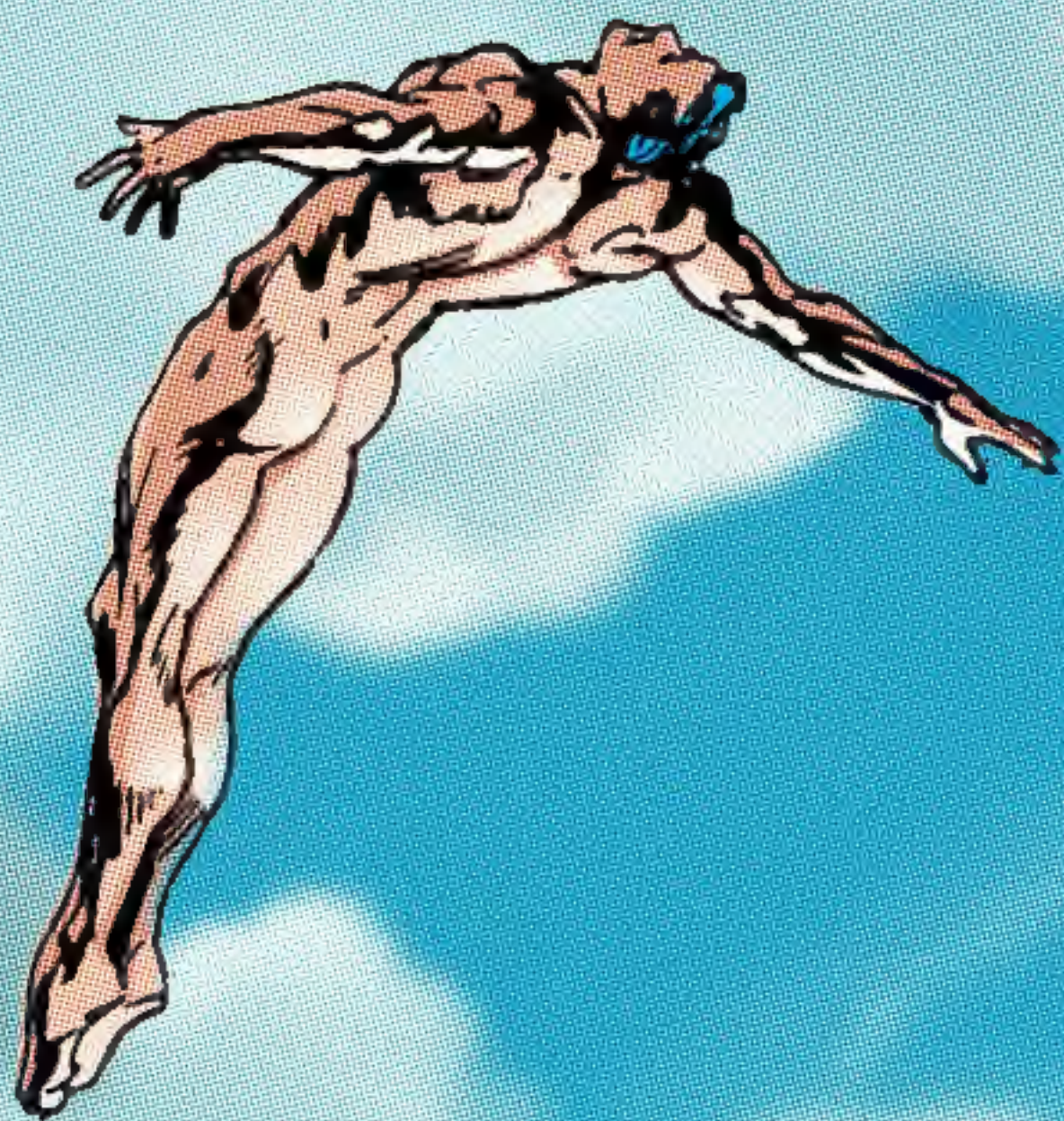


IN MY
DREAMS
I FLY.

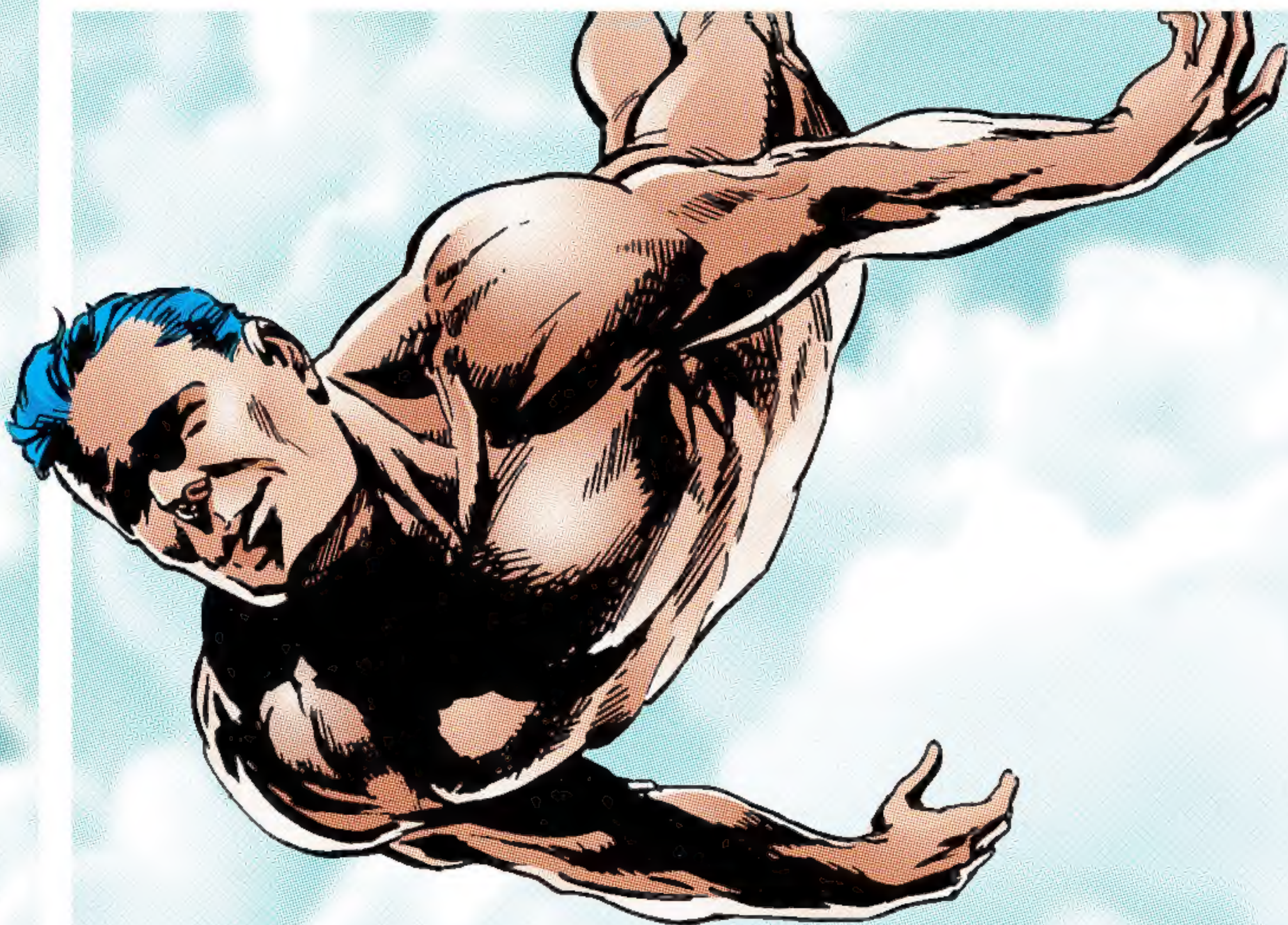
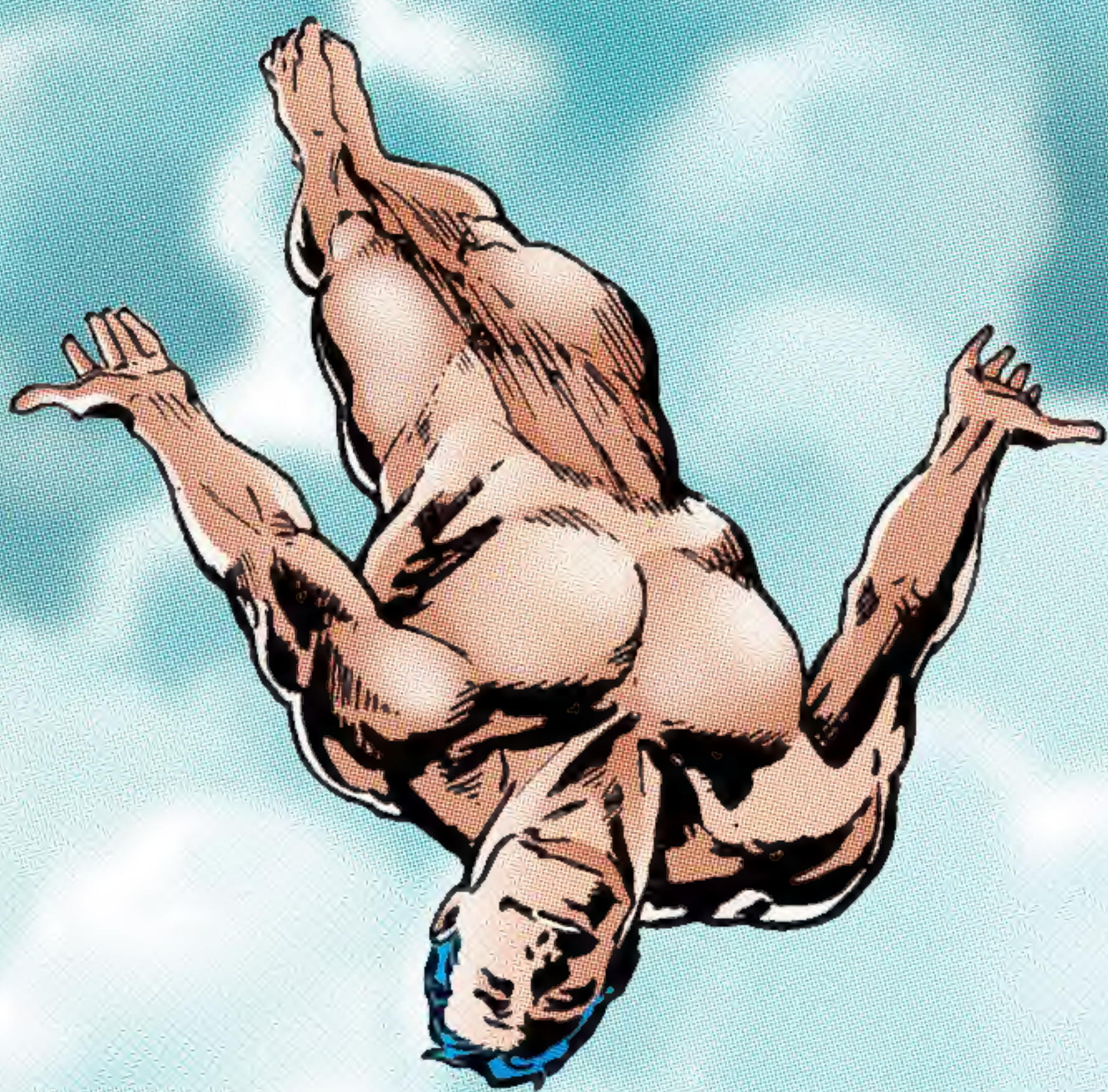
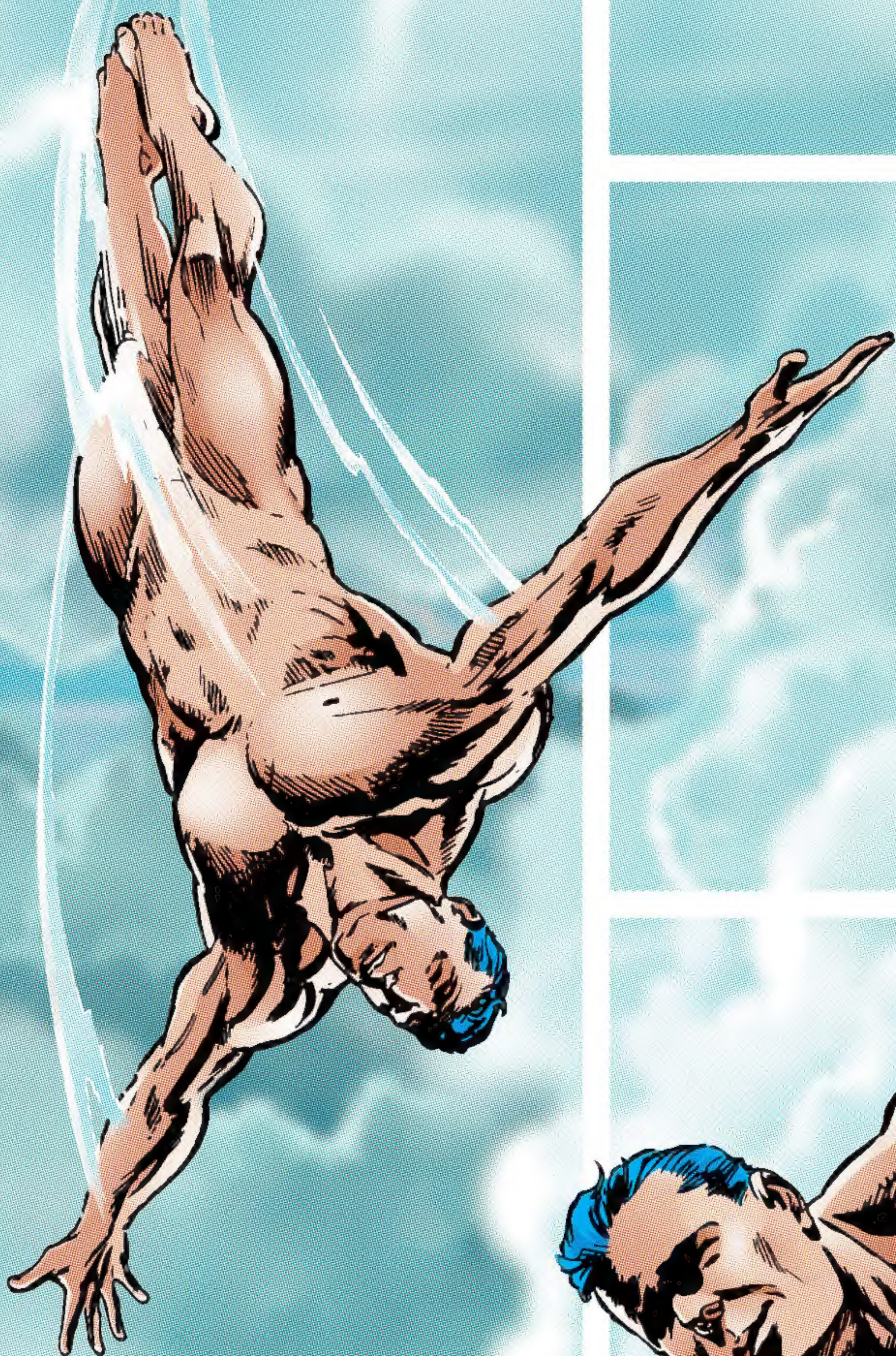
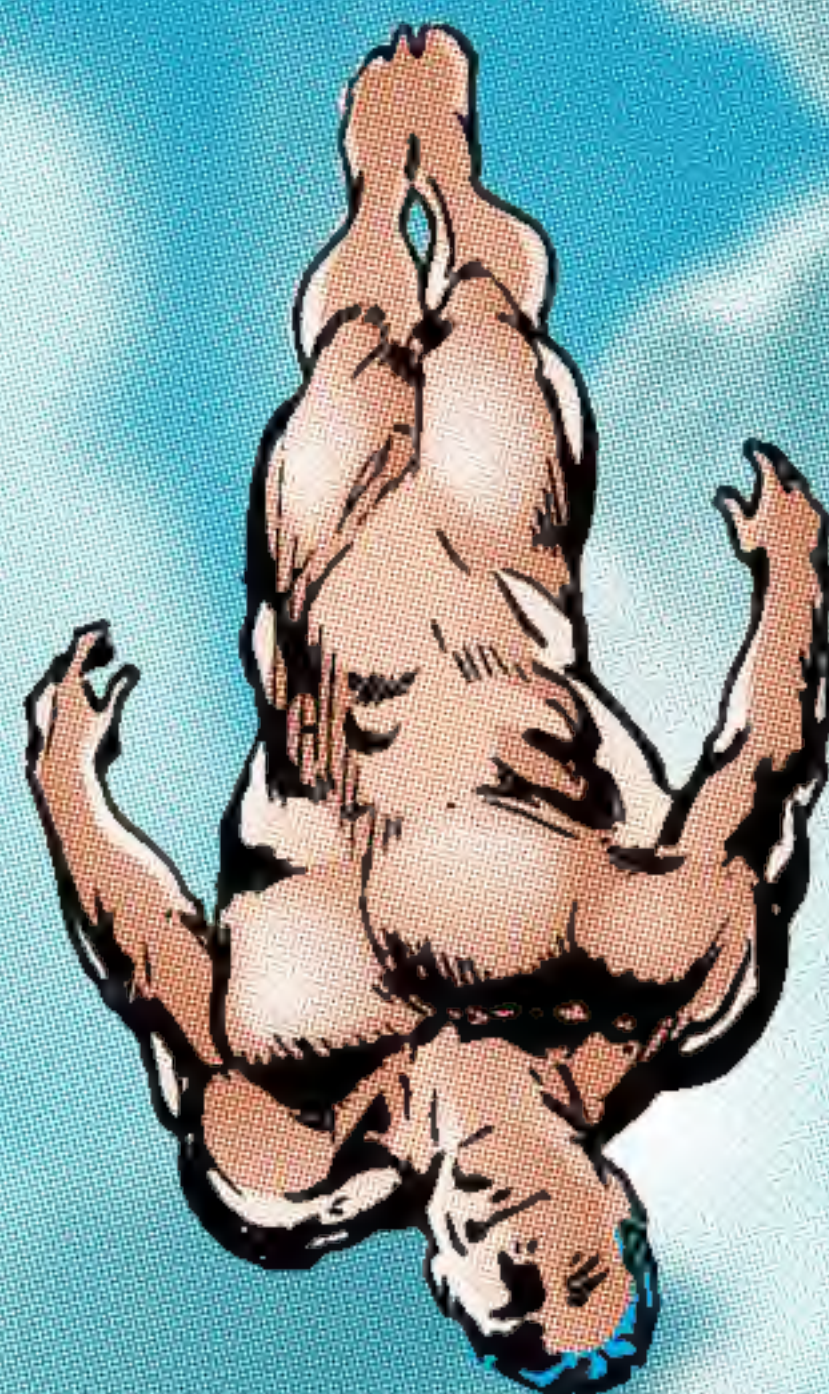
IN DREAMS

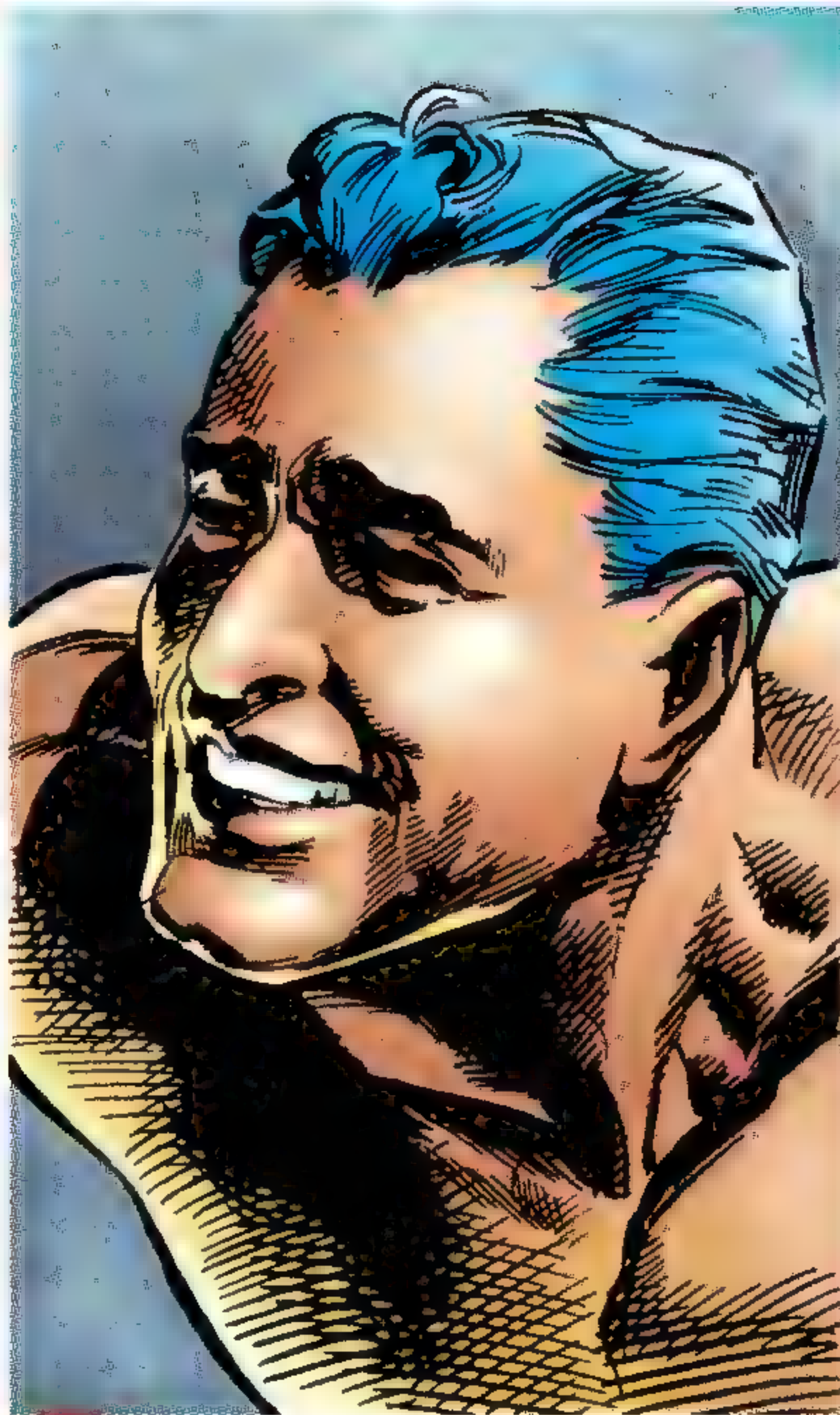
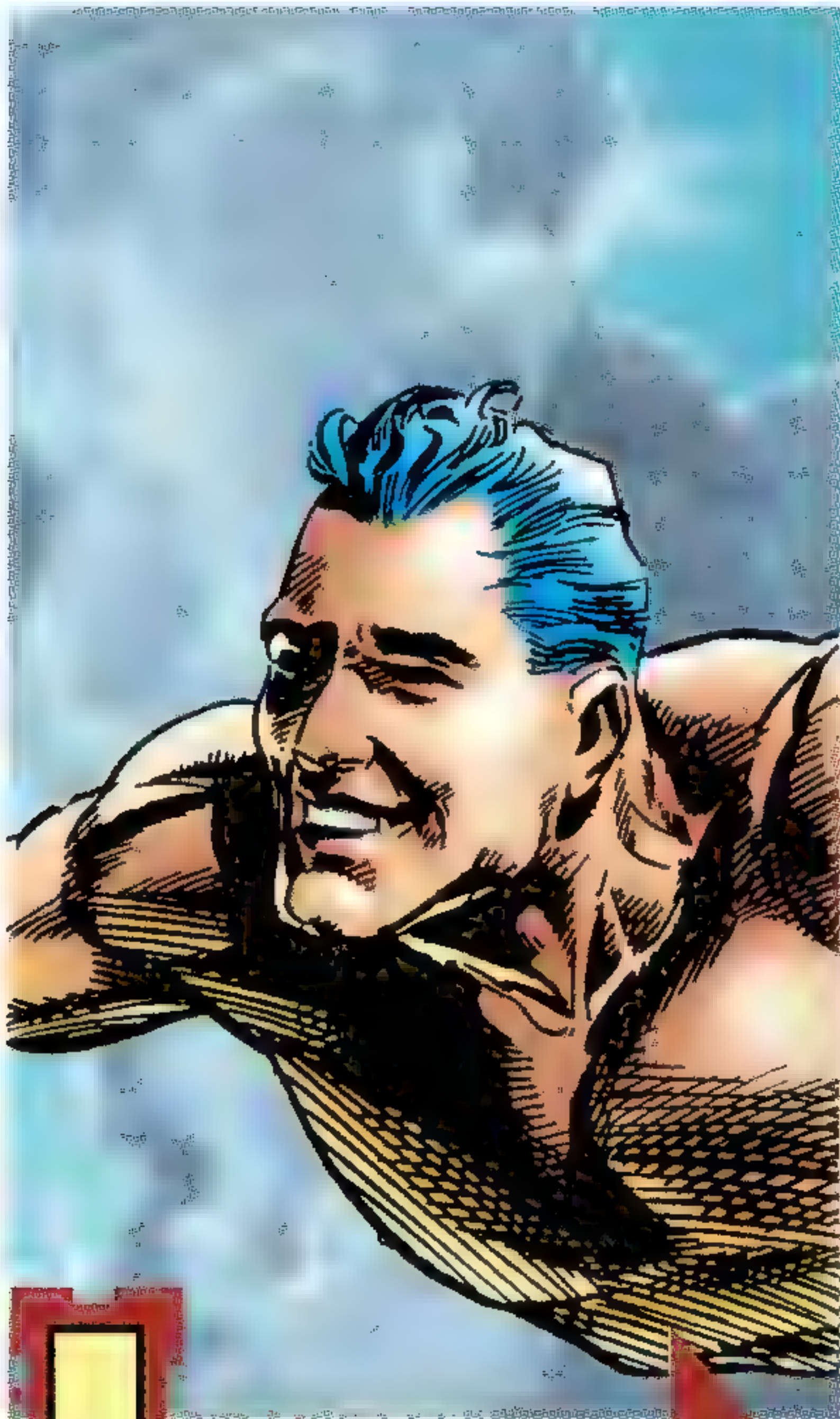
I SOAR UNFETTERED
AND SERENE, LAUGHING
AT GRAVITY AND AT CARE.

THE CLOUDS EMBRACE
ME AS A FRIEND AND
THE WIND LAZILY
TOUSLES MY HAIR.



I LOSE
MYSELF IN
THE SUN
AND SKY.



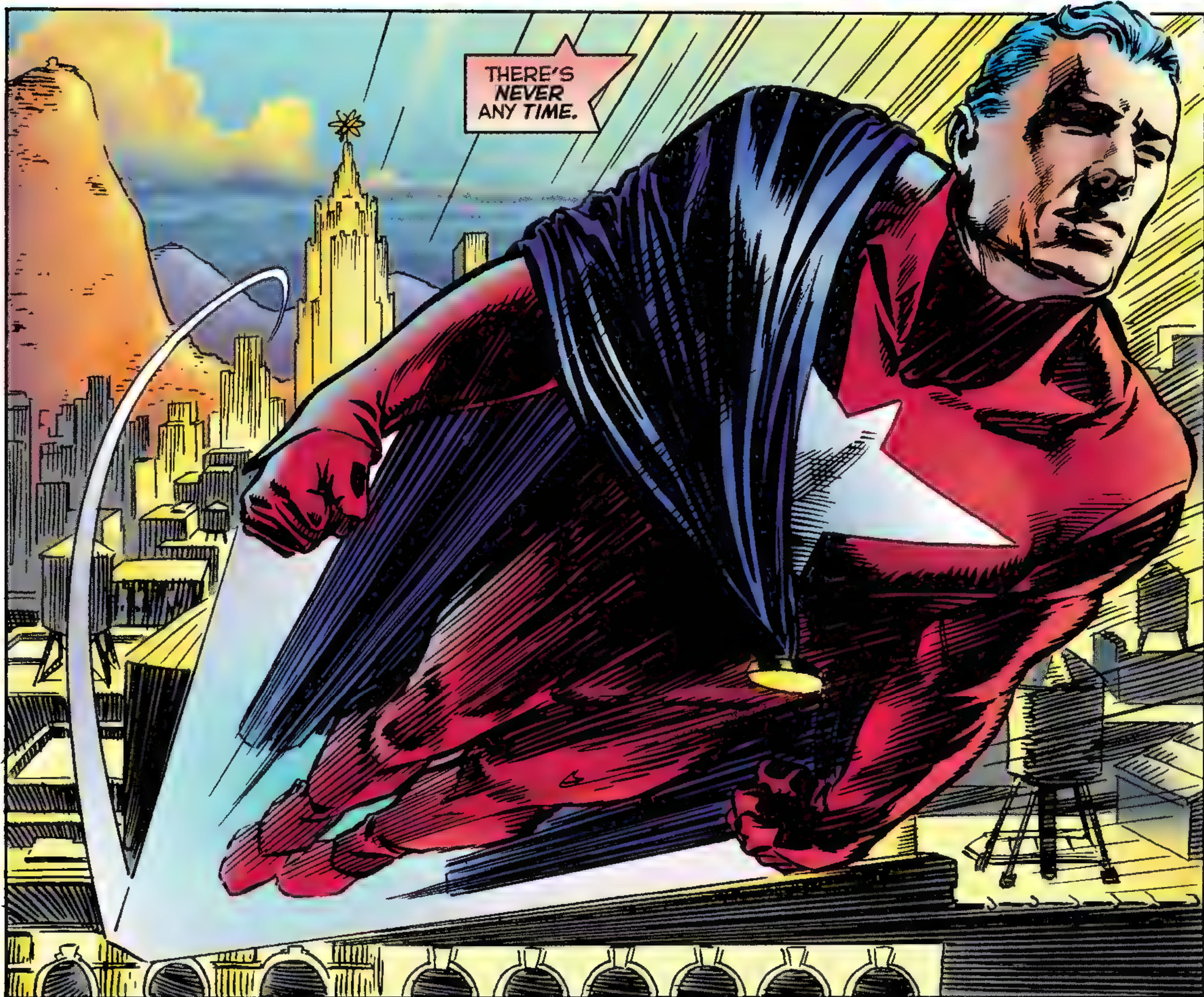
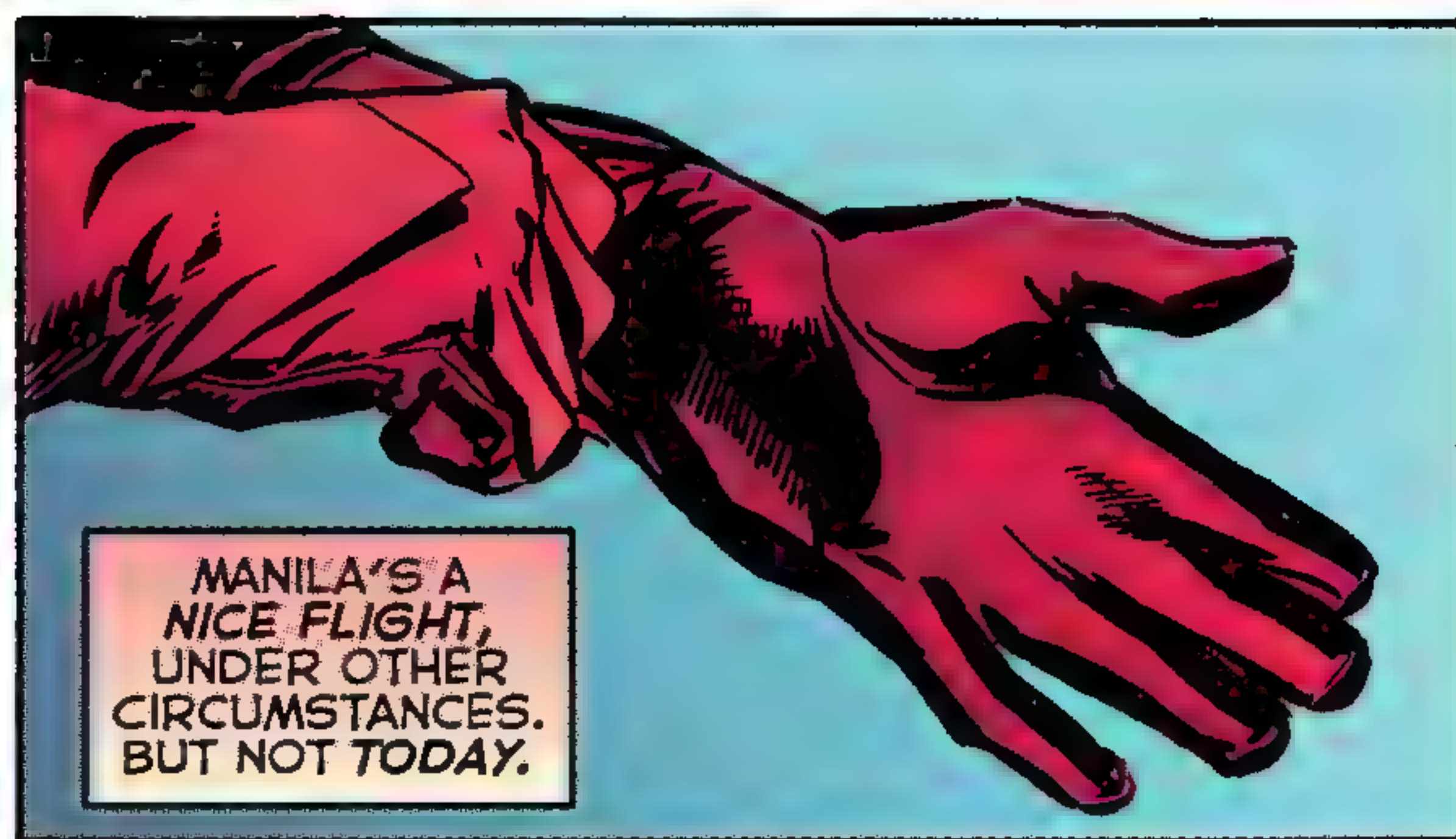
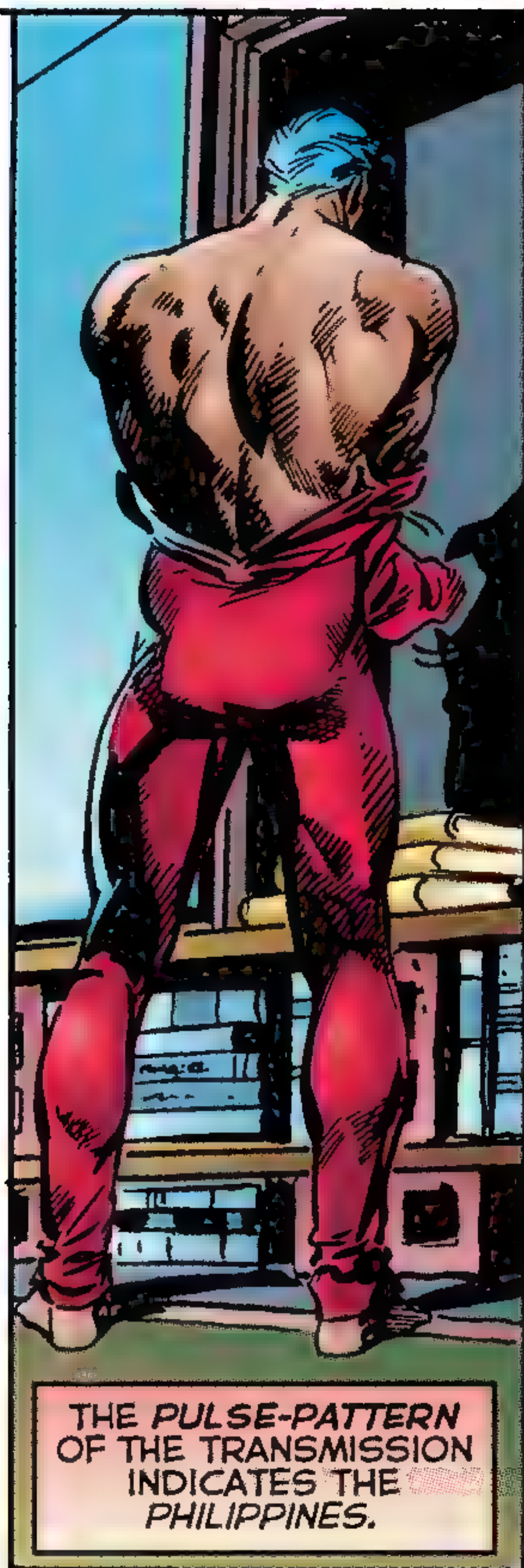


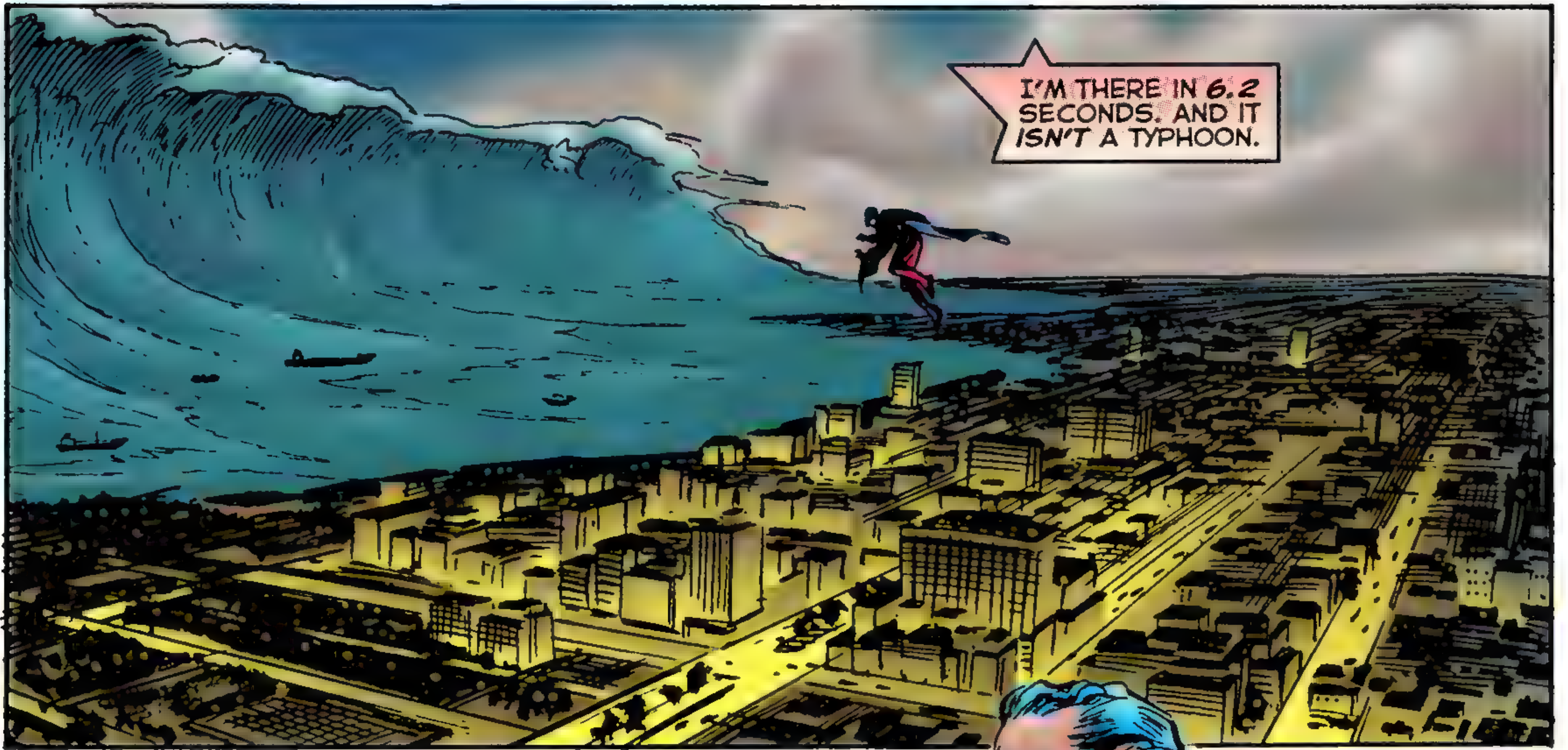
AND THEN
THE NOISE --



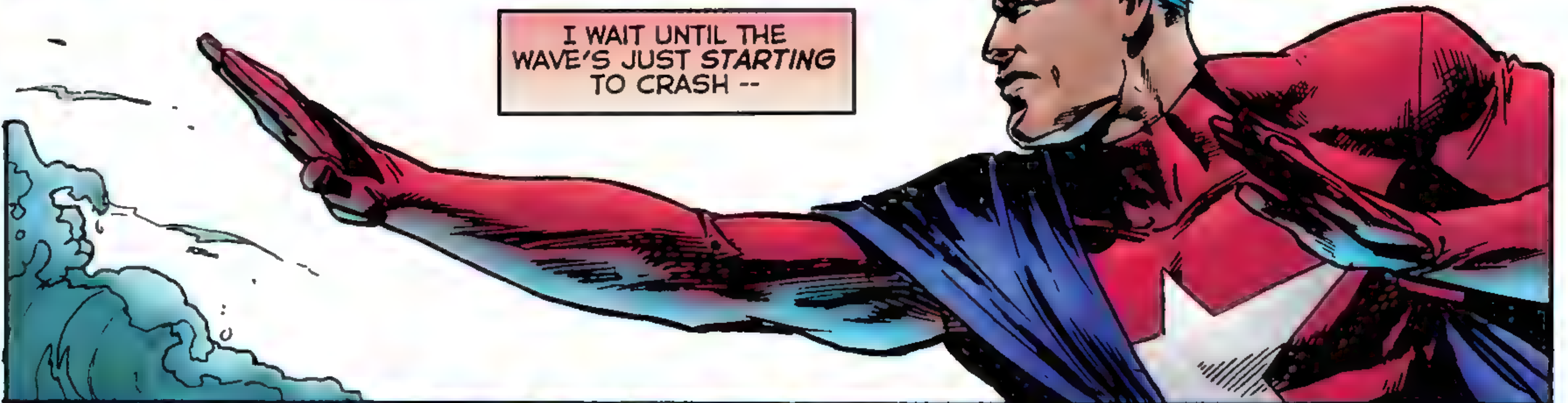
-- THE HARSH,
INSISTENT
JANGLE THAT
SHREDS MY
PEACE --

-- THAT
DRAGS ME
BACK TO
EARTH ONCE
MORE --





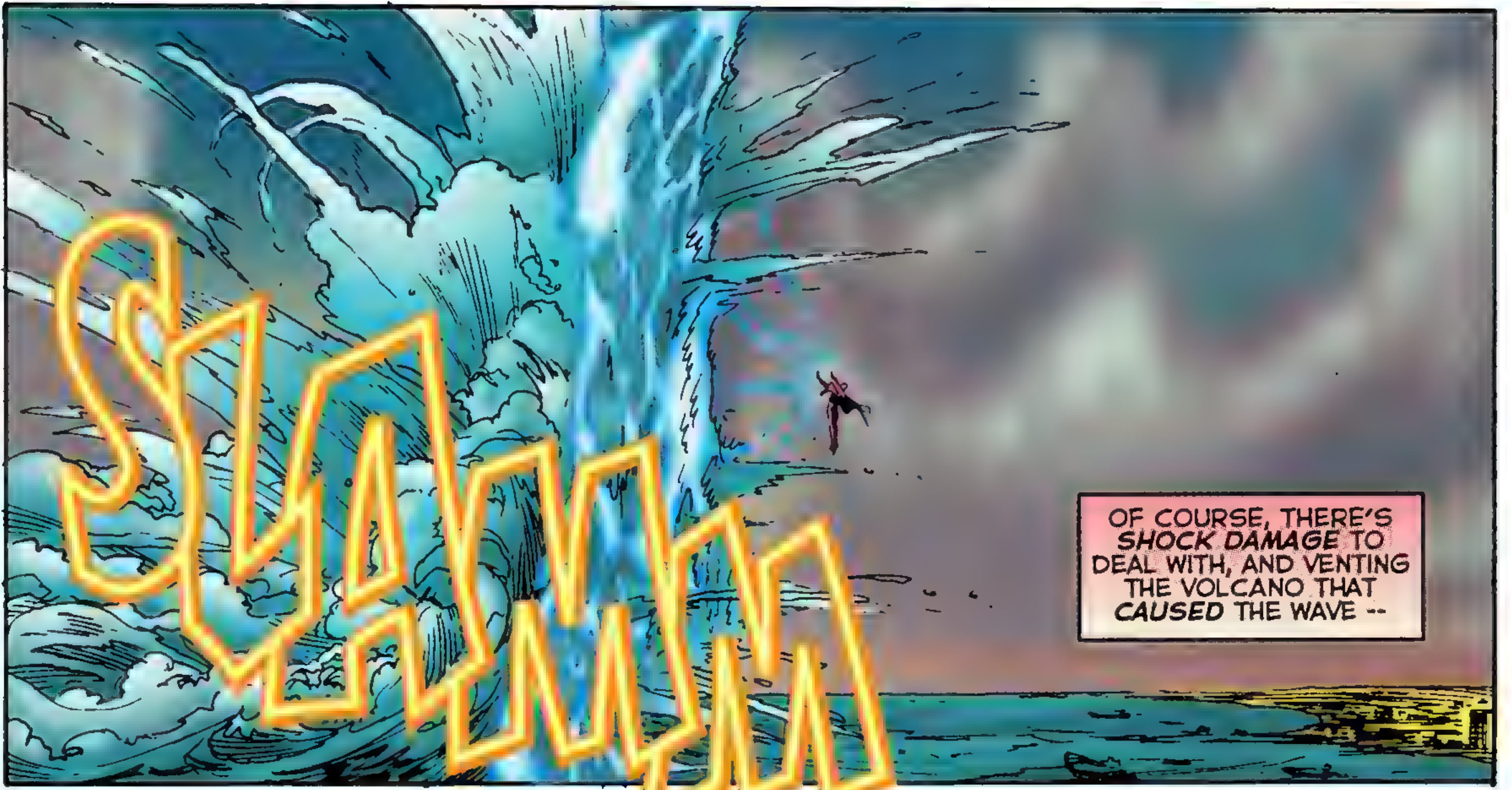
I'M THERE IN 6.2 SECONDS. AND IT ISN'T A TYPHOON.



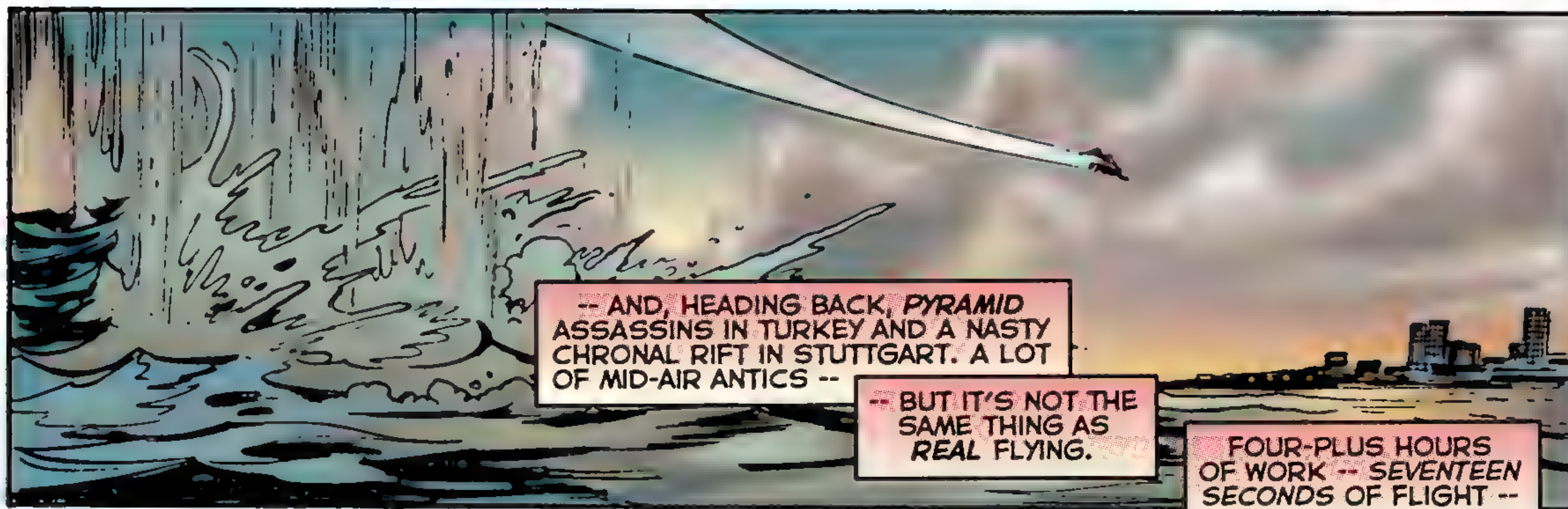
I WAIT UNTIL THE WAVE'S JUST STARTING TO CRASH --



-- AND --



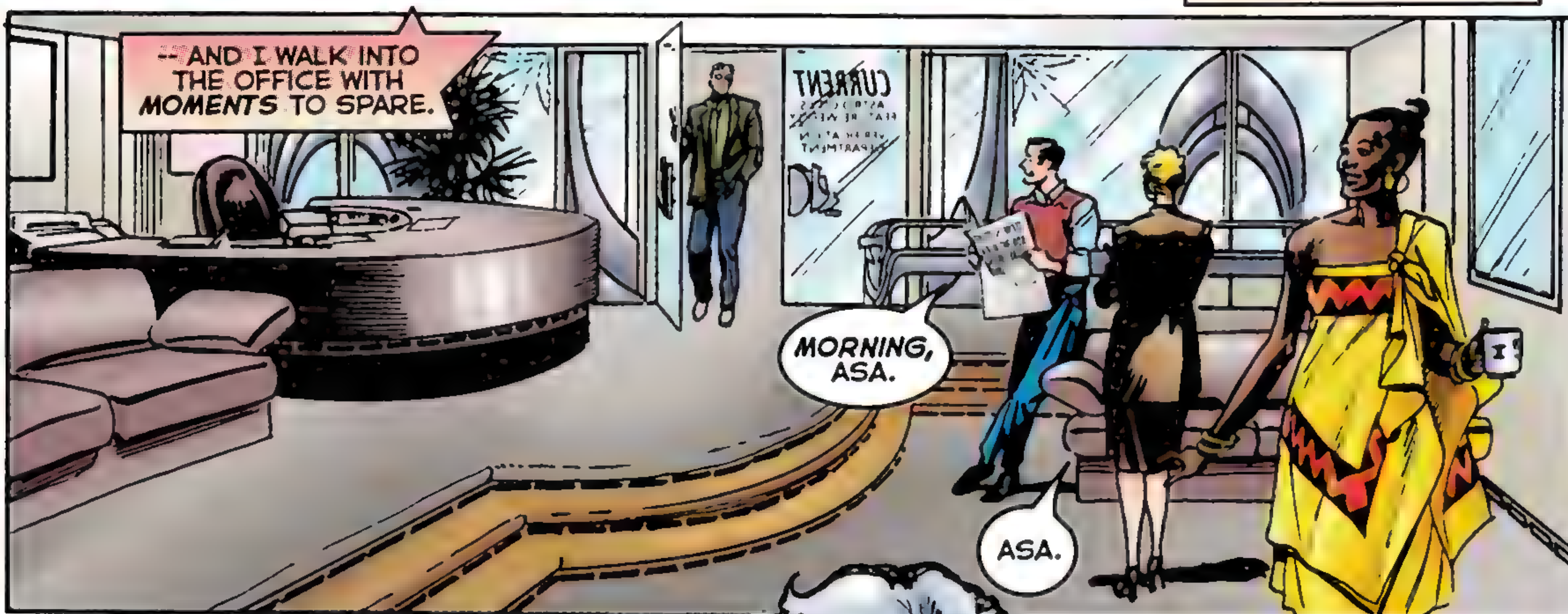
OF COURSE, THERE'S SHOCK DAMAGE TO DEAL WITH, AND VENTING THE VOLCANO THAT CAUSED THE WAVE --



-- AND, HEADING BACK, PYRAMID ASSASSINS IN TURKEY AND A NASTY CHRONAL RIFT IN STUTTGART. A LOT OF MID-AIR ANTICS --

BUT IT'S NOT THE SAME THING AS REAL FLYING.

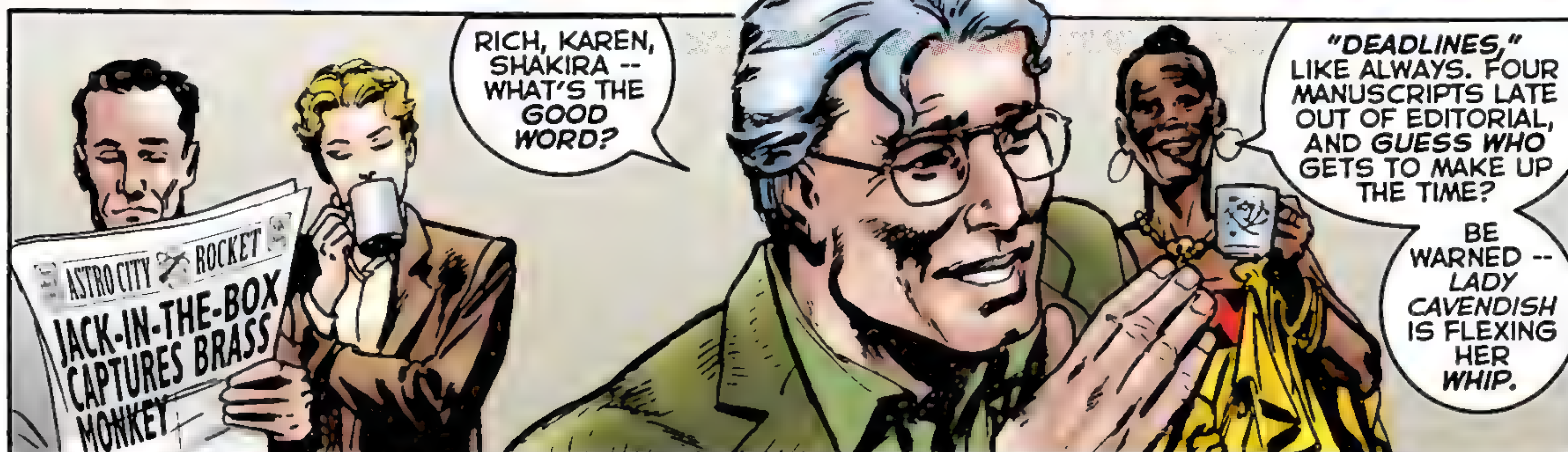
FOUR-PLUS HOURS OF WORK -- SEVENTEEN SECONDS OF FLIGHT --



-- AND I WALK INTO THE OFFICE WITH MOMENTS TO SPARE.

MORNING, ASA.

ASA.



RICH, KAREN, SHAKIRA -- WHAT'S THE GOOD WORD?

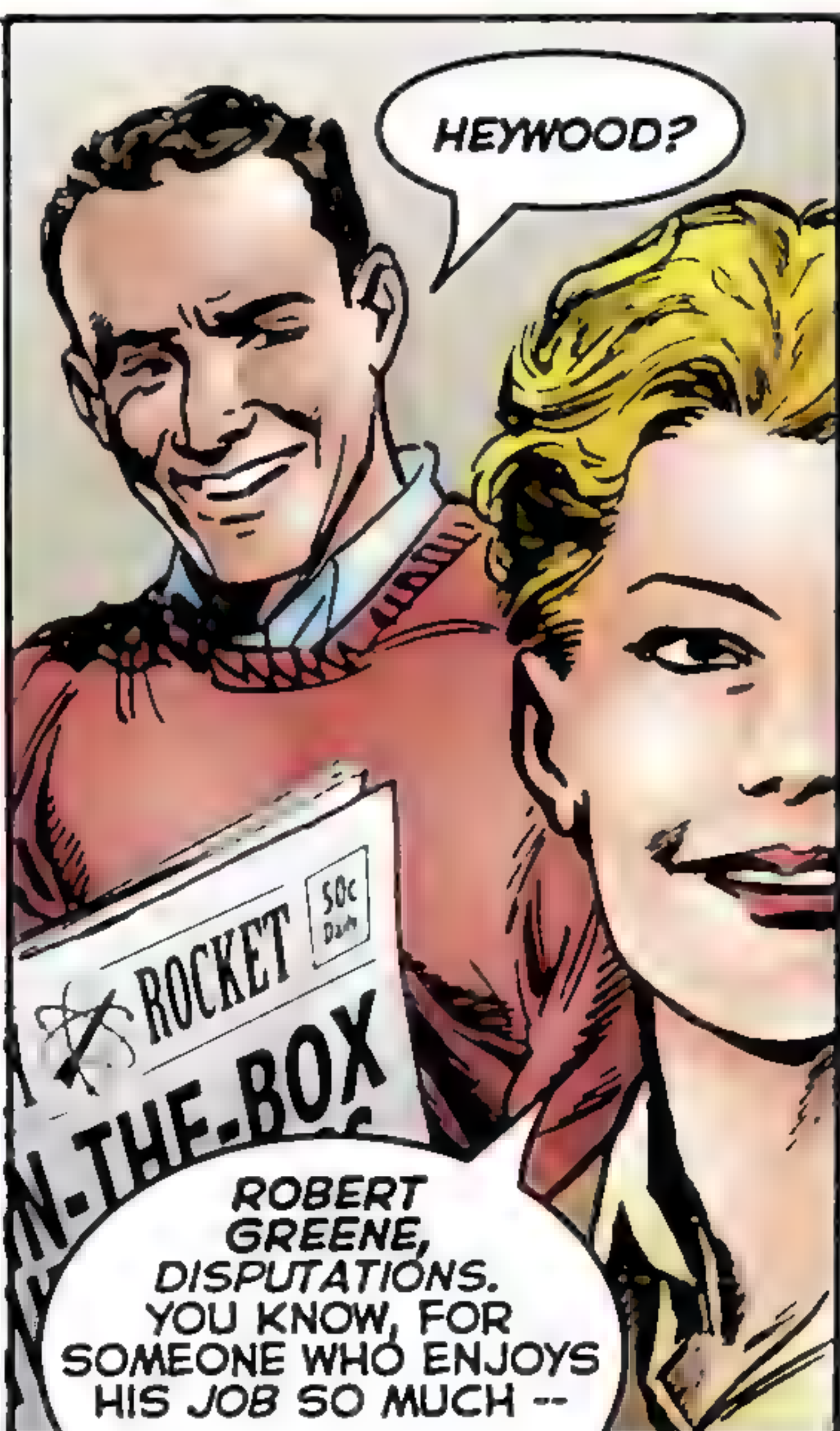
"DEADLINES," LIKE ALWAYS. FOUR MANUSCRIPTS LATE OUT OF EDITORIAL, AND GUESS WHO GETS TO MAKE UP THE TIME?

BE WARNED -- LADY CAVENDISH IS FLEXING HER WHIP.



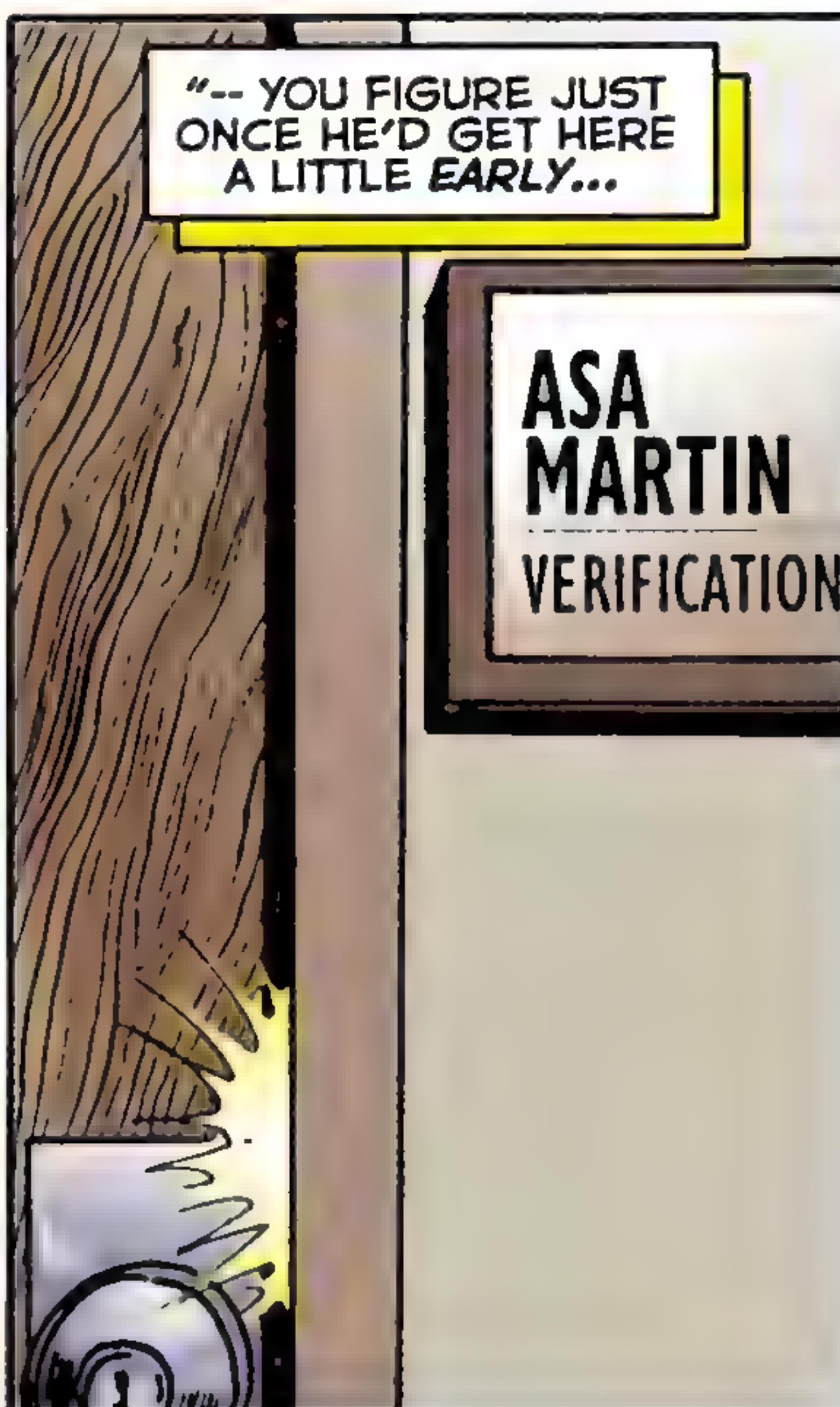
WELL, IF THINGS ARE THAT DIRE, MIGHT AS WELL GET TO IT.

"TIME NOR TIDE TARRIETH NO MAN."



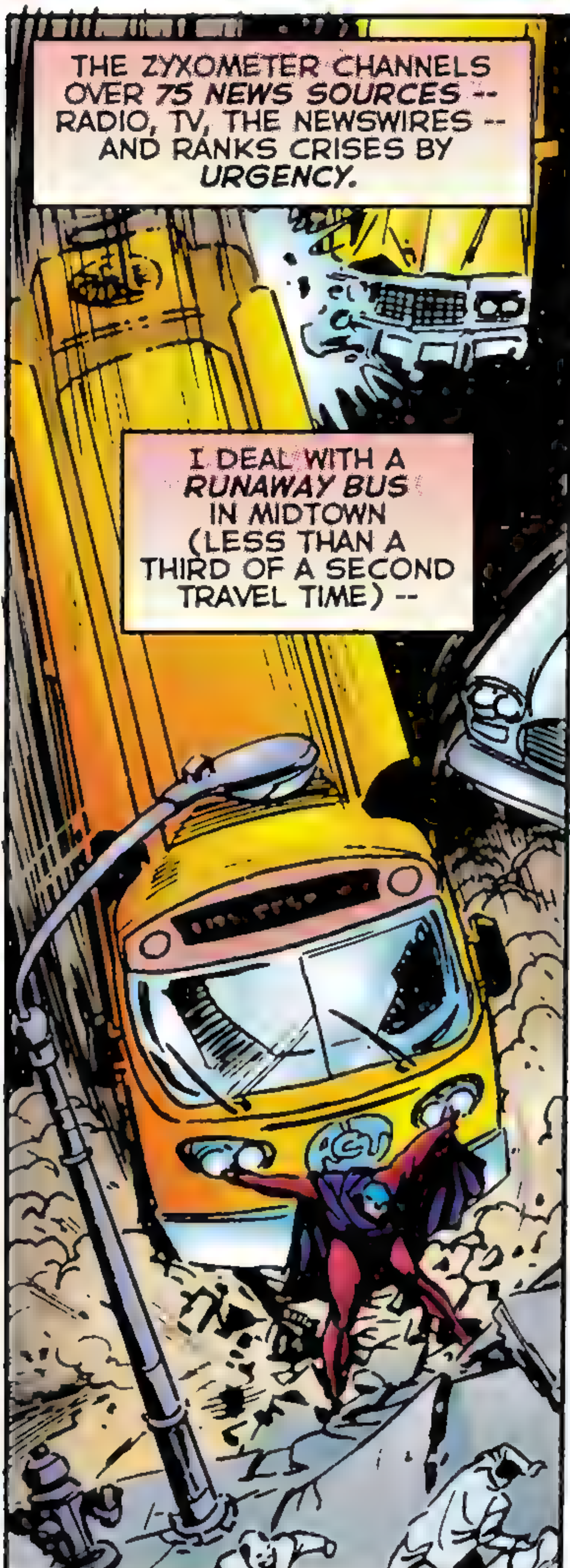
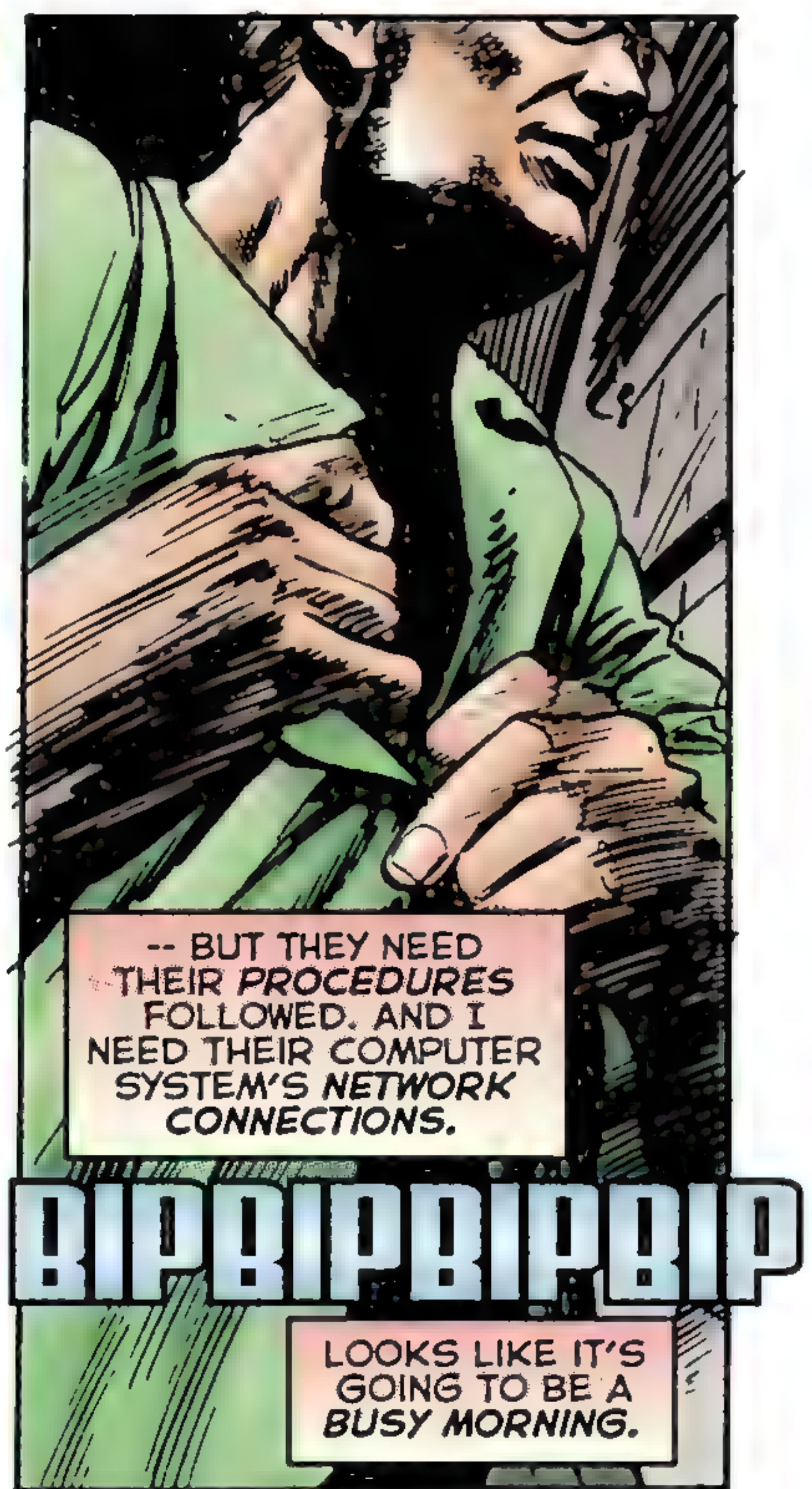
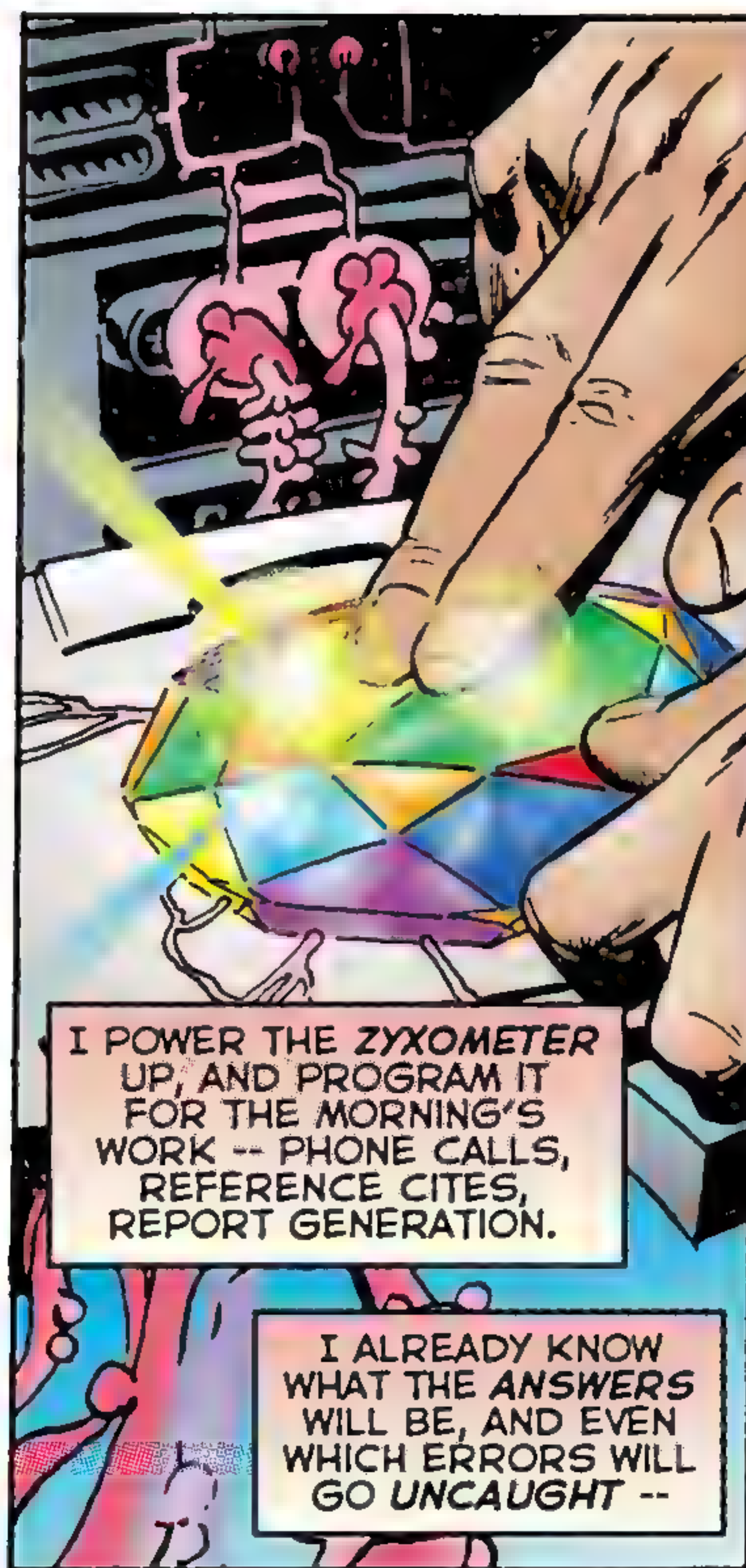
HEYWOOD?

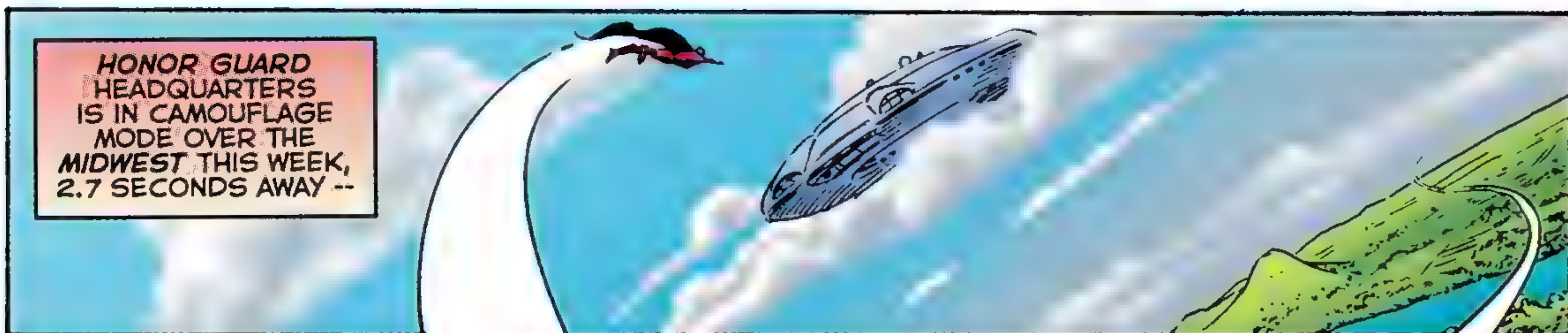
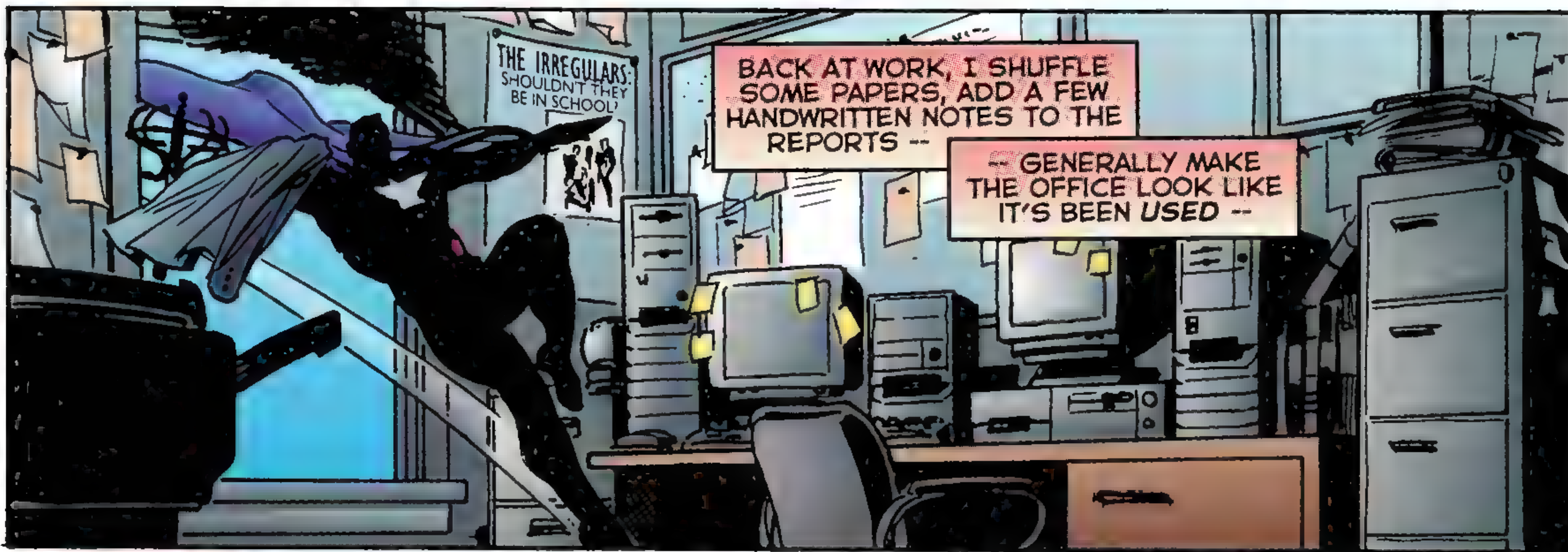
ROBERT GREENE, DISPUTATIONS. YOU KNOW, FOR SOMEONE WHO ENJOYS HIS JOB SO MUCH --

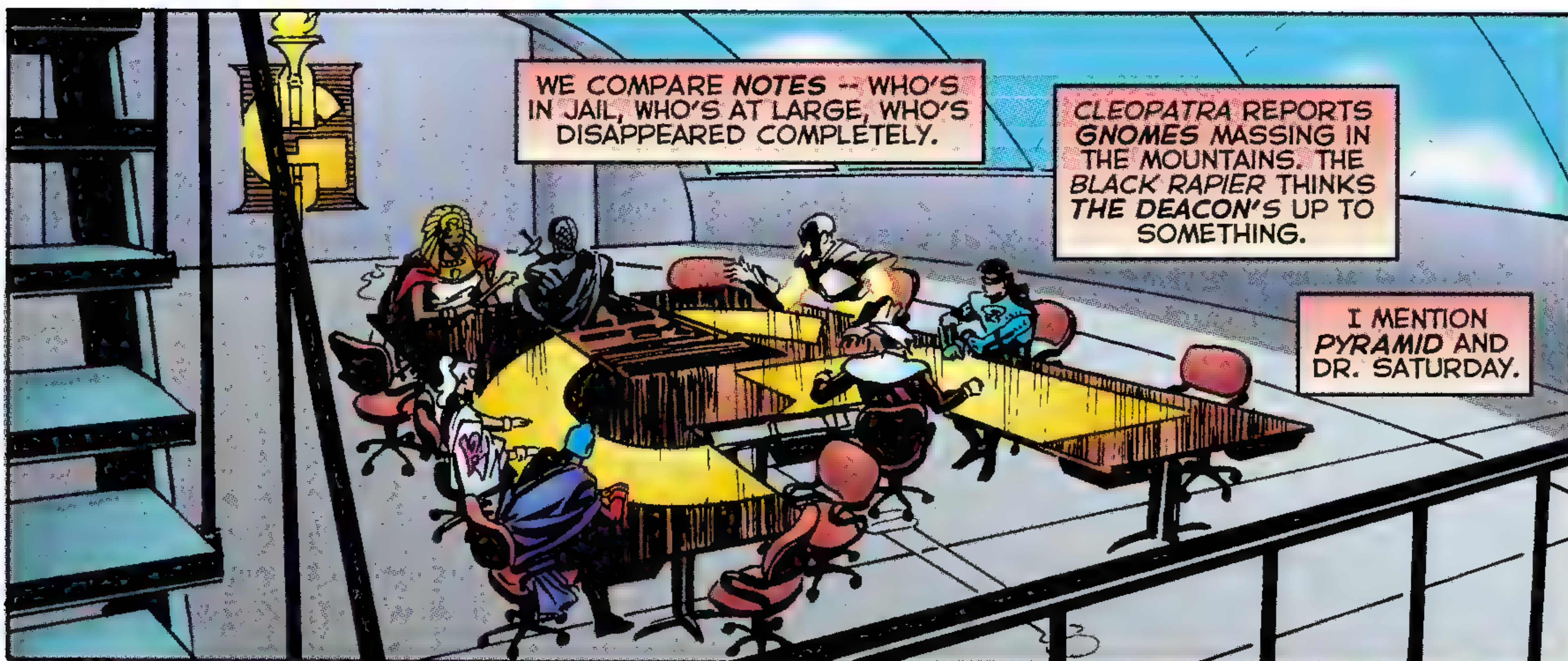


-- YOU FIGURE JUST ONCE HE'D GET HERE A LITTLE EARLY...

ASA MARTIN VERIFICATION



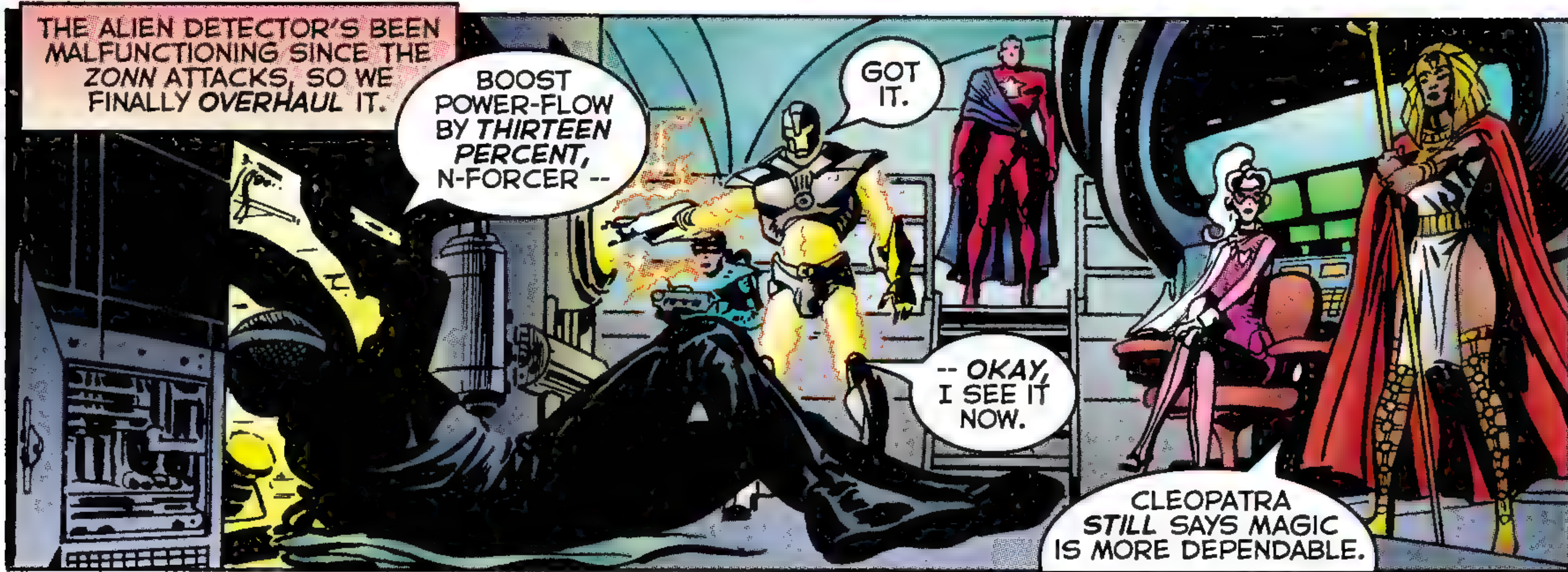




WE COMPARE NOTES -- WHO'S IN JAIL, WHO'S AT LARGE, WHO'S DISAPPEARED COMPLETELY.

CLEOPATRA REPORTS GNOMES MASSING IN THE MOUNTAINS. THE BLACK RAPIER THINKS THE DEACON'S UP TO SOMETHING.

I MENTION PYRAMID AND DR. SATURDAY.



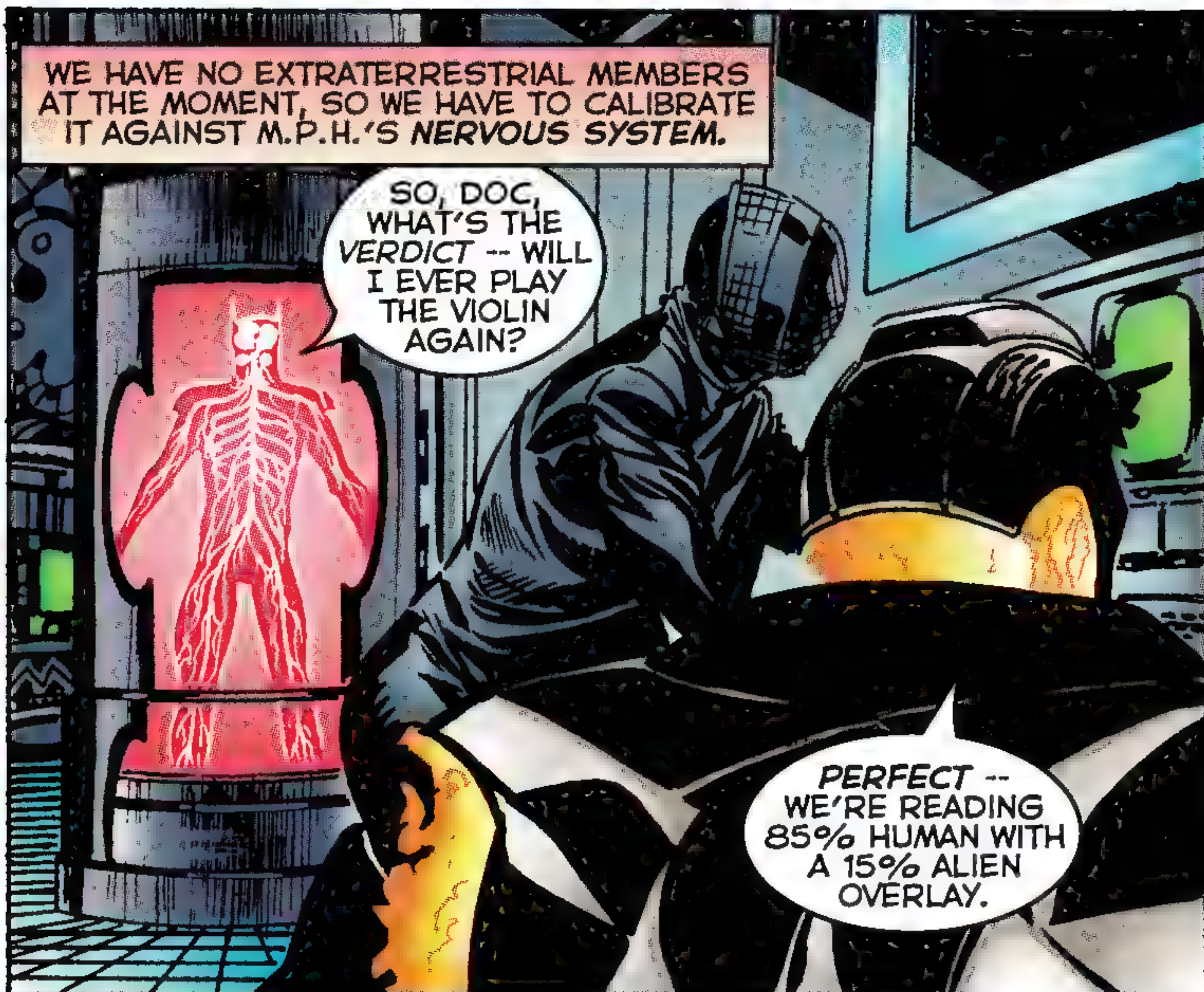
THE ALIEN DETECTOR'S BEEN MALFUNCTIONING SINCE THE ZONN ATTACKS, SO WE FINALLY OVERHAUL IT.

BOOST POWER-FLOW BY THIRTEEN PERCENT, N-FORCER --

GOT IT.

-- OKAY, I SEE IT NOW.

CLEOPATRA STILL SAYS MAGIC IS MORE DEPENDABLE.



WE HAVE NO EXTRATERRESTRIAL MEMBERS AT THE MOMENT, SO WE HAVE TO CALIBRATE IT AGAINST M.P.H.'S NERVOUS SYSTEM.

SO, DOC, WHAT'S THE VERDICT -- WILL I EVER PLAY THE VIOLIN AGAIN?

PERFECT -- WE'RE READING 85% HUMAN WITH A 15% ALIEN OVERLAY.



-- AND LOOK! ZERO SENSE OF HUMOR!

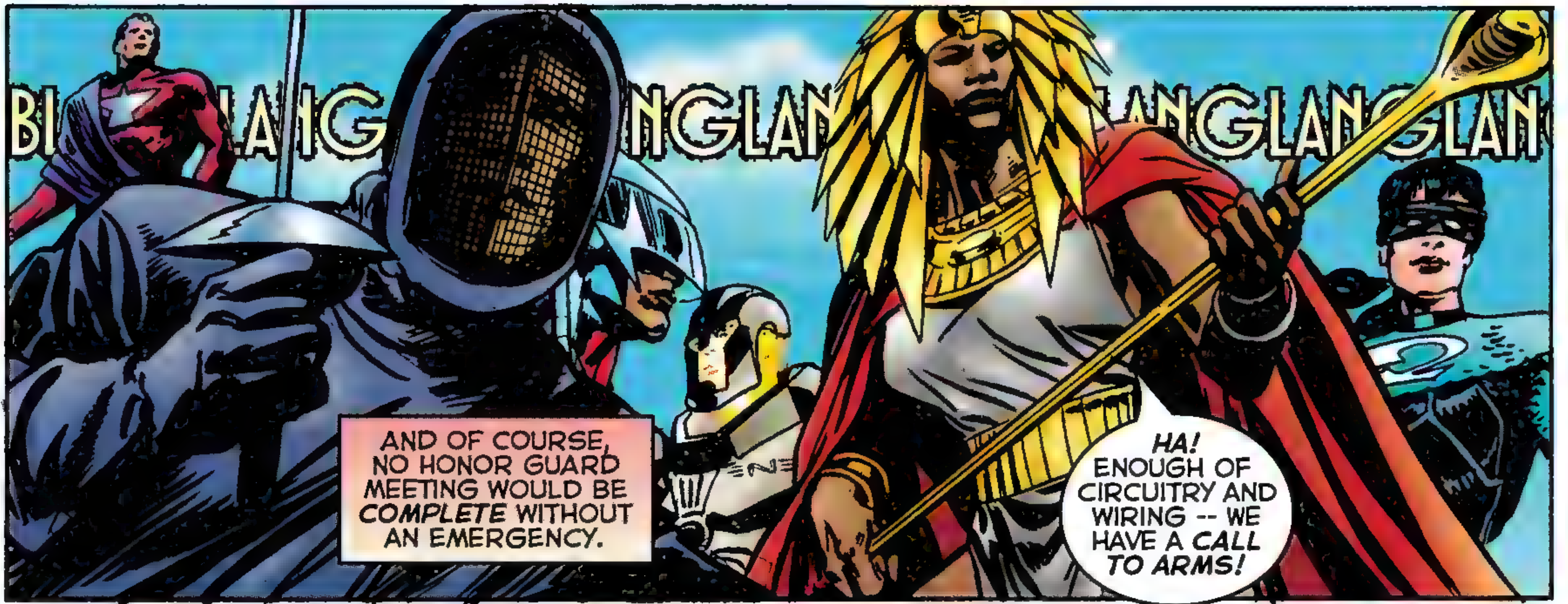
THAT OUGHT TO HOLD, UNTIL WE CAN BORROW THE XENIFORM FROM LEAVENWORTH --



-- OR BEAUTIE BRINGS THE TOURIST BY.

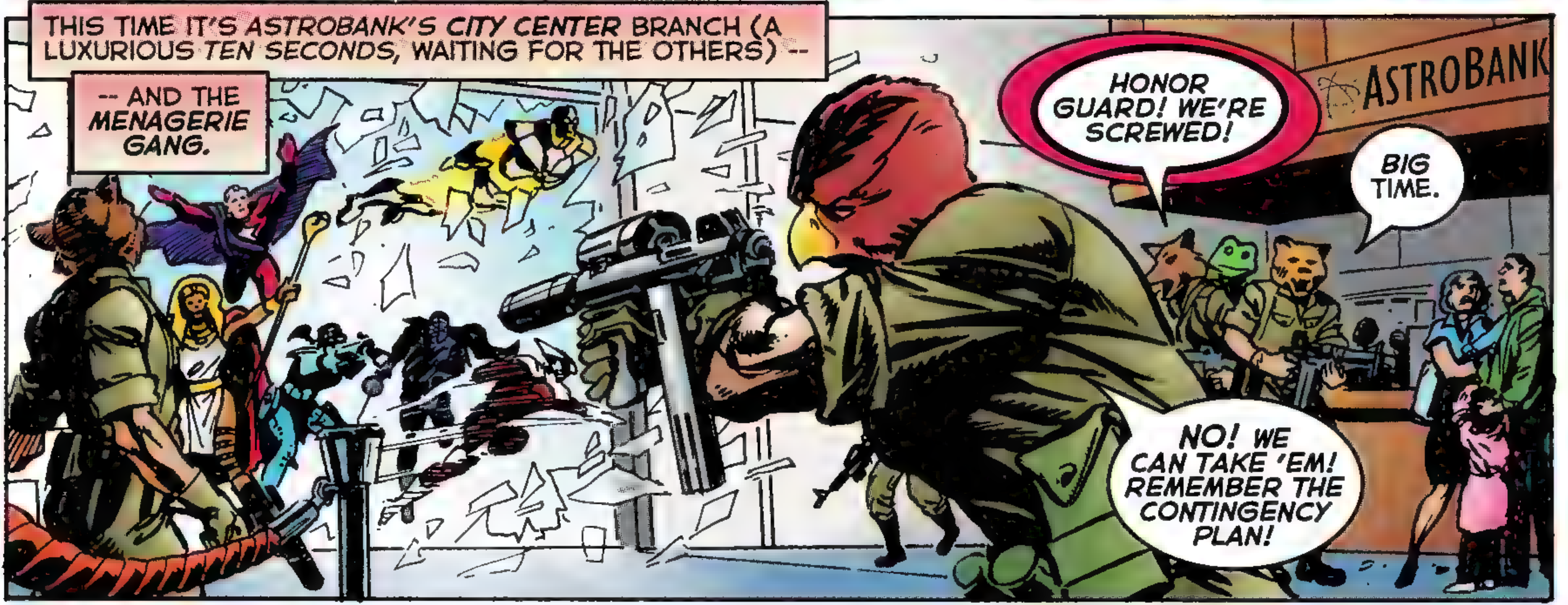
I HOPE IT'S THE XENIFORM. I'D RATHER DEAL WITH THREE TONS OF MURDEROUS SHAPE-SHIFTING PROTOPLASM THAN THAT EXTRATERRESTRIAL GADABOUT.

MAYBE TWO XENIFORMS.



AND OF COURSE, NO HONOR GUARD MEETING WOULD BE COMPLETE WITHOUT AN EMERGENCY.

HA! ENOUGH OF CIRCUITRY AND WIRING -- WE HAVE A CALL TO ARMS!



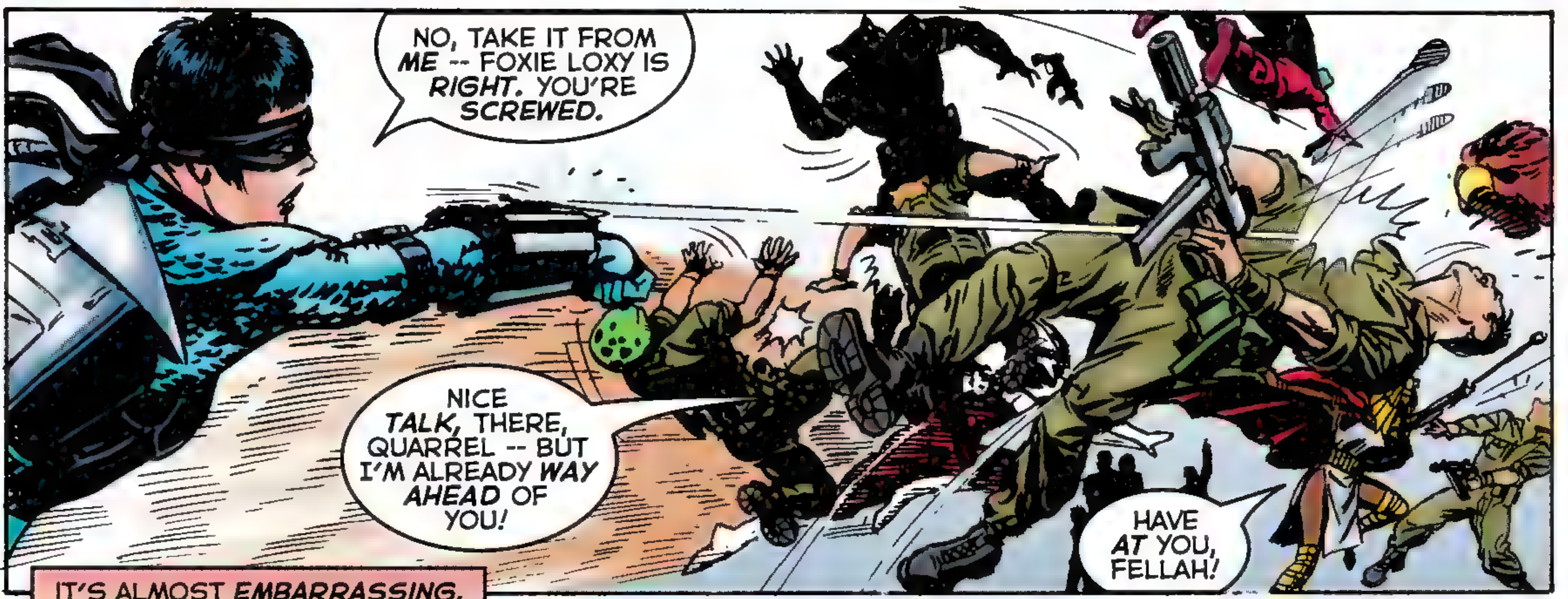
THIS TIME IT'S ASTROBANK'S CITY CENTER BRANCH (A LUXURIOUS TEN SECONDS, WAITING FOR THE OTHERS) --

-- AND THE MENAGERIE GANG.

HONOR GUARD! WE'RE SCREWED!

BIG TIME.

NO! WE CAN TAKE 'EM! REMEMBER THE CONTINGENCY PLAN!

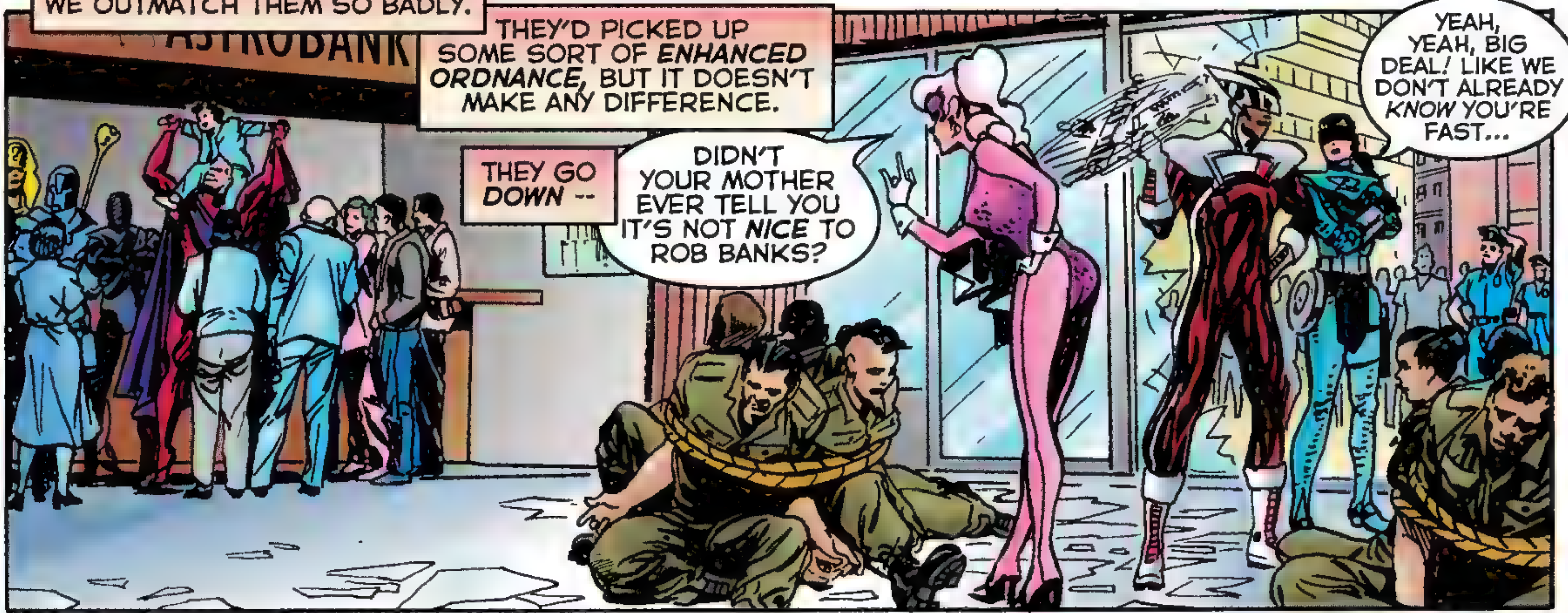


NO, TAKE IT FROM ME -- FOXIE LOXY IS RIGHT. YOU'RE SCREWED.

NICE TALK, THERE, QUARREL -- BUT I'M ALREADY WAY AHEAD OF YOU!

HAVE AT YOU, FELLAH!

IT'S ALMOST EMBARRASSING, WE OUTMATCH THEM SO BADLY.

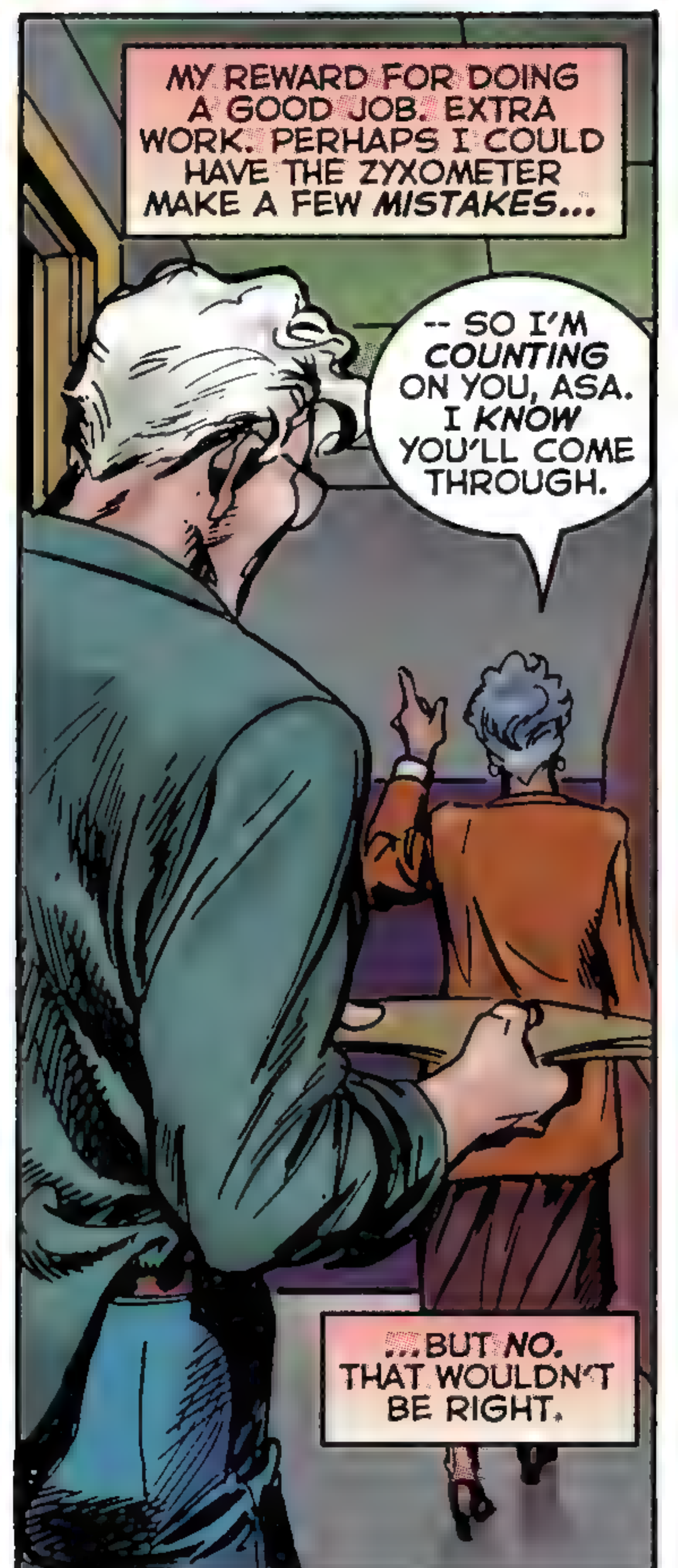
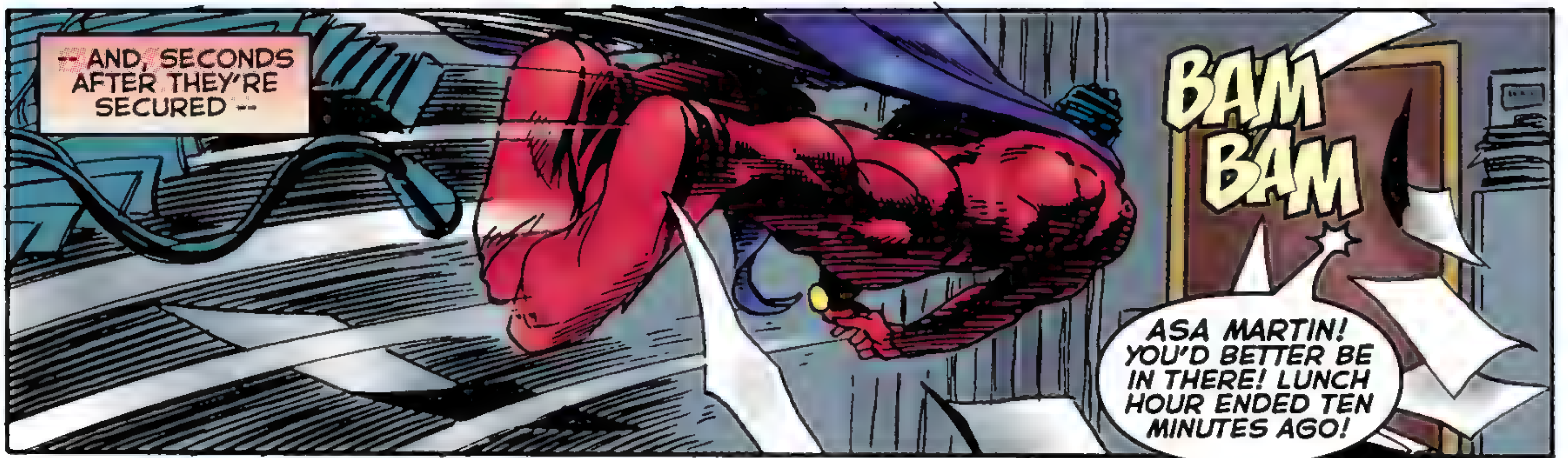


THEY'D PICKED UP SOME SORT OF ENHANCED ORDNANCE, BUT IT DOESN'T MAKE ANY DIFFERENCE.

THEY GO DOWN --

DIDN'T YOUR MOTHER EVER TELL YOU IT'S NOT NICE TO ROB BANKS?

YEAH, YEAH, BIG DEAL! LIKE WE DON'T ALREADY KNOW YOU'RE FAST...





I OPEN THE FOLDER
TO SEE WHAT'S SO
CLASSIFIED --

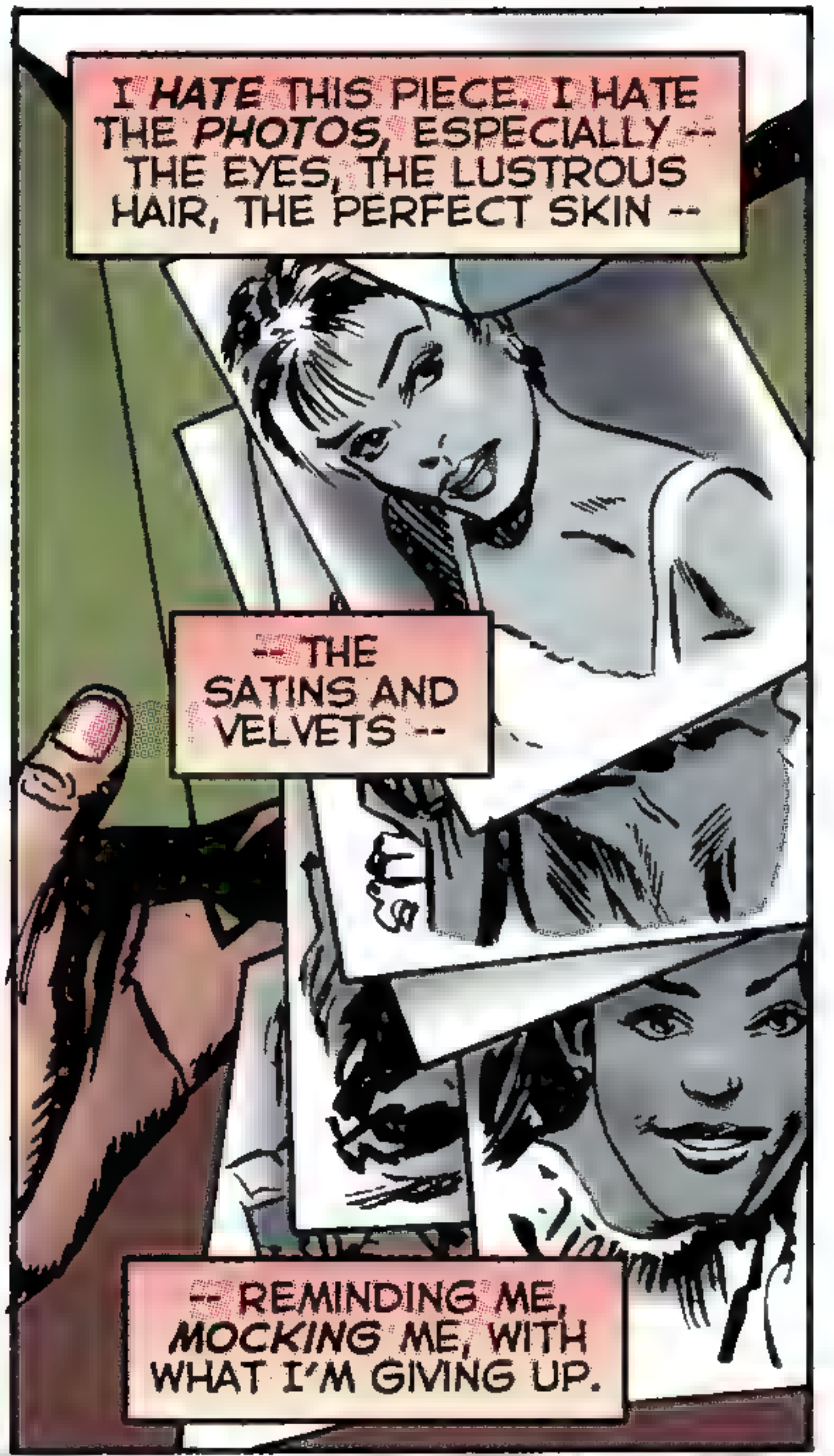
-- AND
MY HEART
SINKS.



IT'S OUR ANNUAL FEATURE
ON THE 25 MOST BEAUTIFUL
WOMEN IN ASTRO CITY.

OUR
BRIGHTEST
STARS

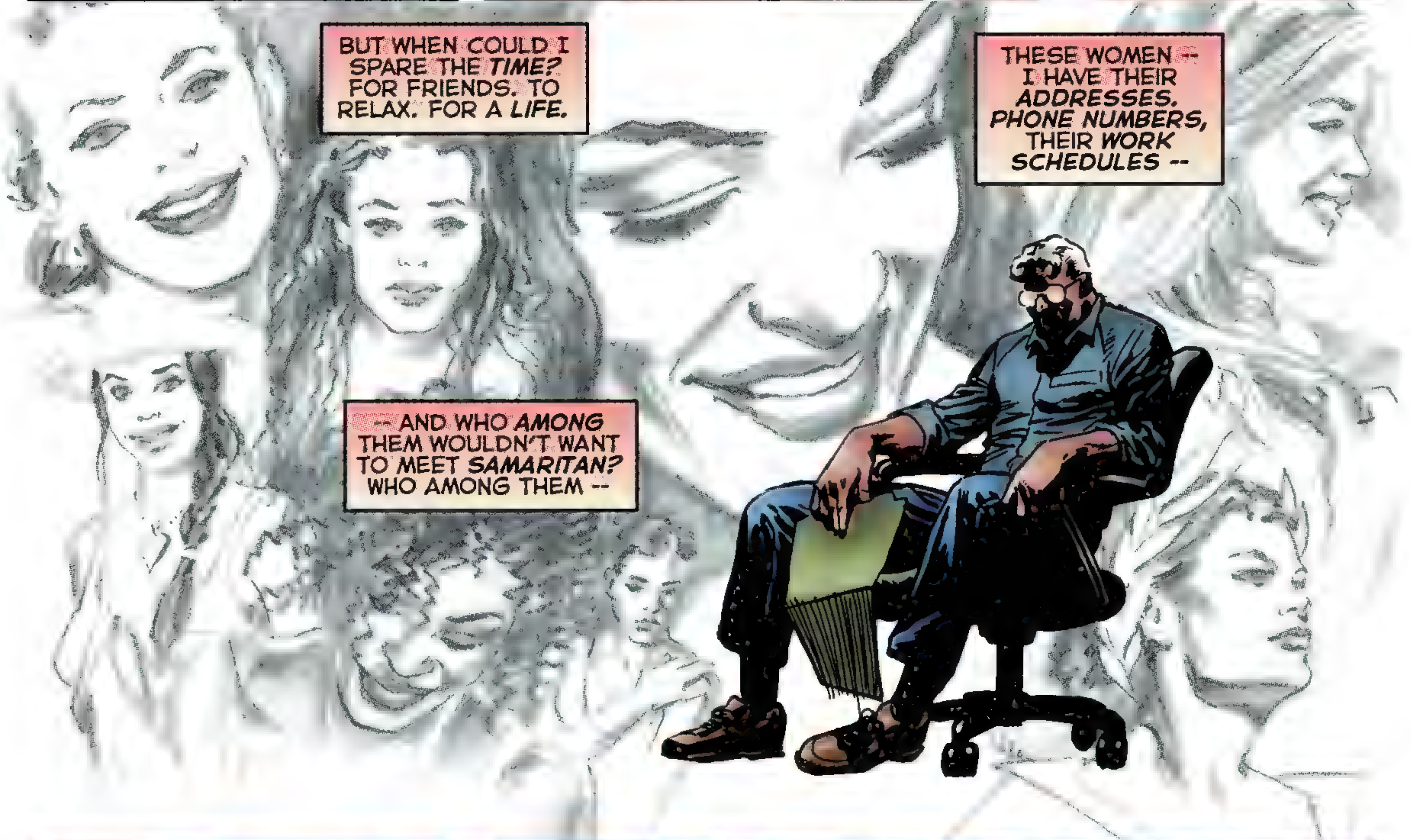
Astro City's
25 Loveliest
Luminaries



I HATE THIS PIECE. I HATE
THE PHOTOS, ESPECIALLY --
THE EYES, THE LUSTROUS
HAIR, THE PERFECT SKIN --

-- THE
SATINS AND
VELVETS --

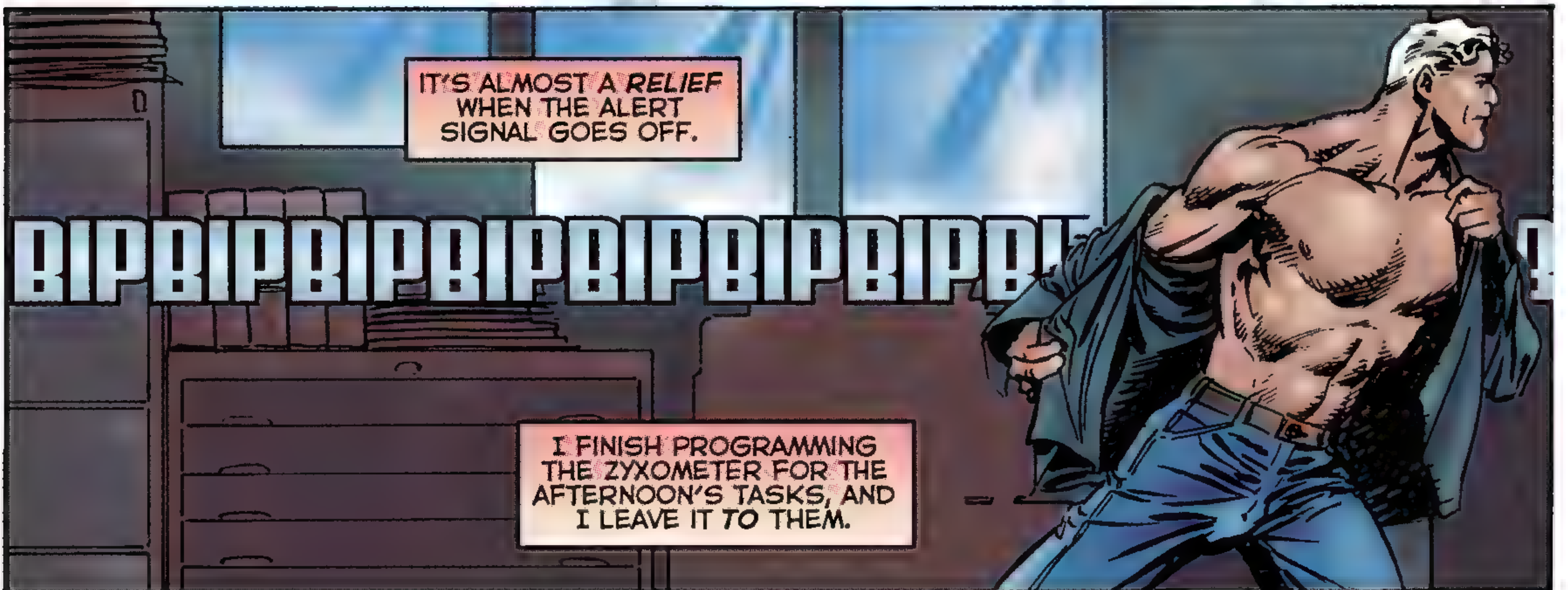
-- REMINDING ME,
MOCKING ME, WITH
WHAT I'M GIVING UP.



BUT WHEN COULD I
SPARE THE TIME?
FOR FRIENDS. TO
RELAX. FOR A LIFE.

THESE WOMEN --
I HAVE THEIR
ADDRESSES,
PHONE NUMBERS,
THEIR WORK
SCHEDULES --

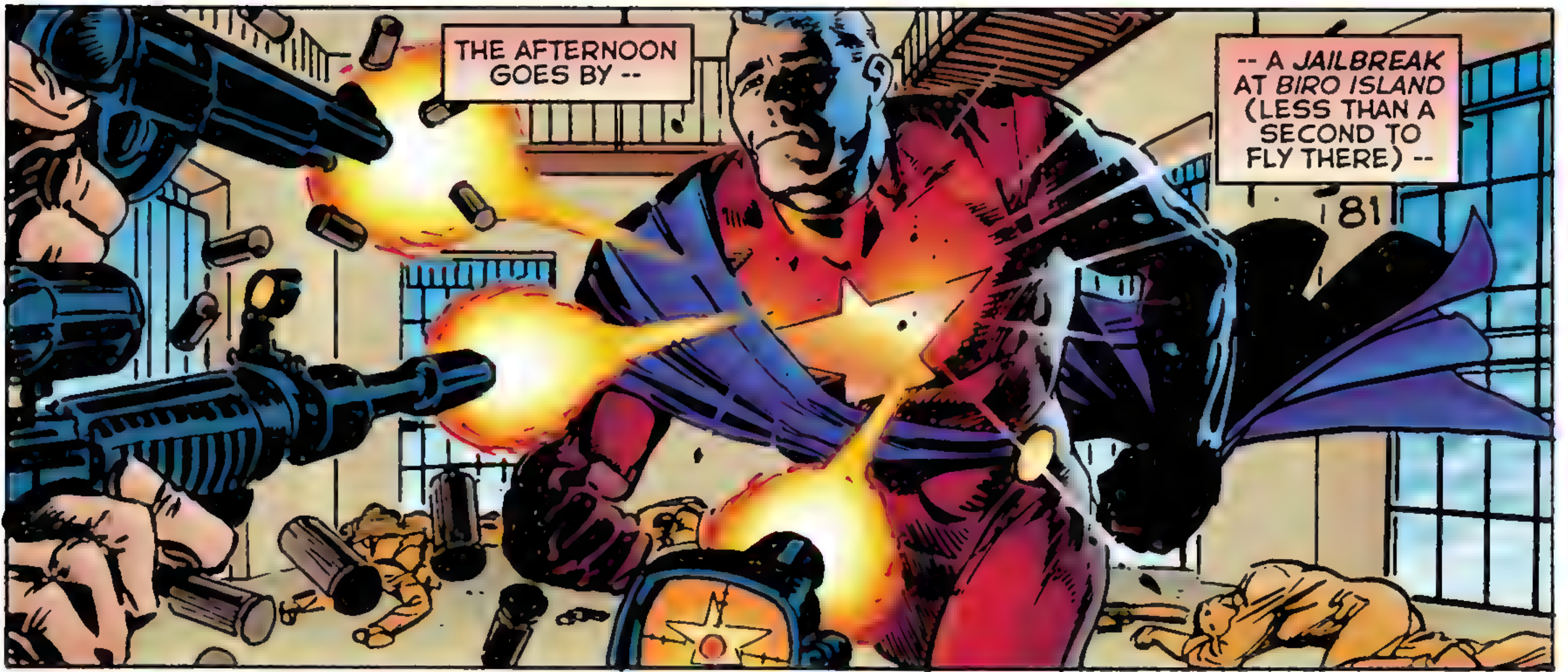
-- AND WHO AMONG
THEM WOULDN'T WANT
TO MEET SAMARITAN?
WHO AMONG THEM --



IT'S ALMOST A RELIEF
WHEN THE ALERT
SIGNAL GOES OFF.

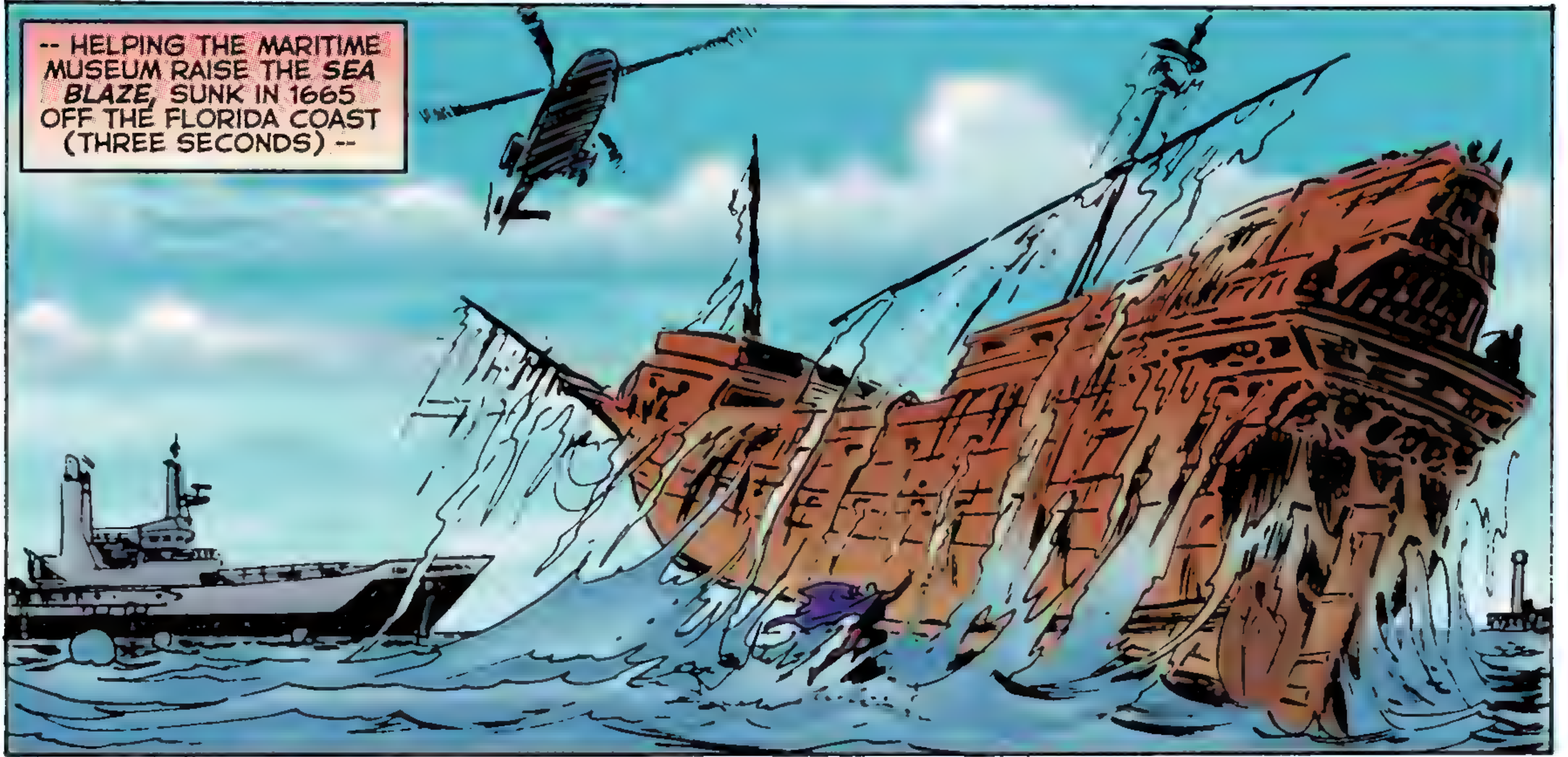
RIPRIPRIPRIPRIPRIPRIP!

I FINISH PROGRAMMING
THE ZYXOMETER FOR THE
AFTERNOON'S TASKS, AND
I LEAVE IT TO THEM.



THE AFTERNOON
GOES BY --

-- A JAILBREAK
AT BIRO ISLAND
(LESS THAN A
SECOND TO
FLY THERE) --



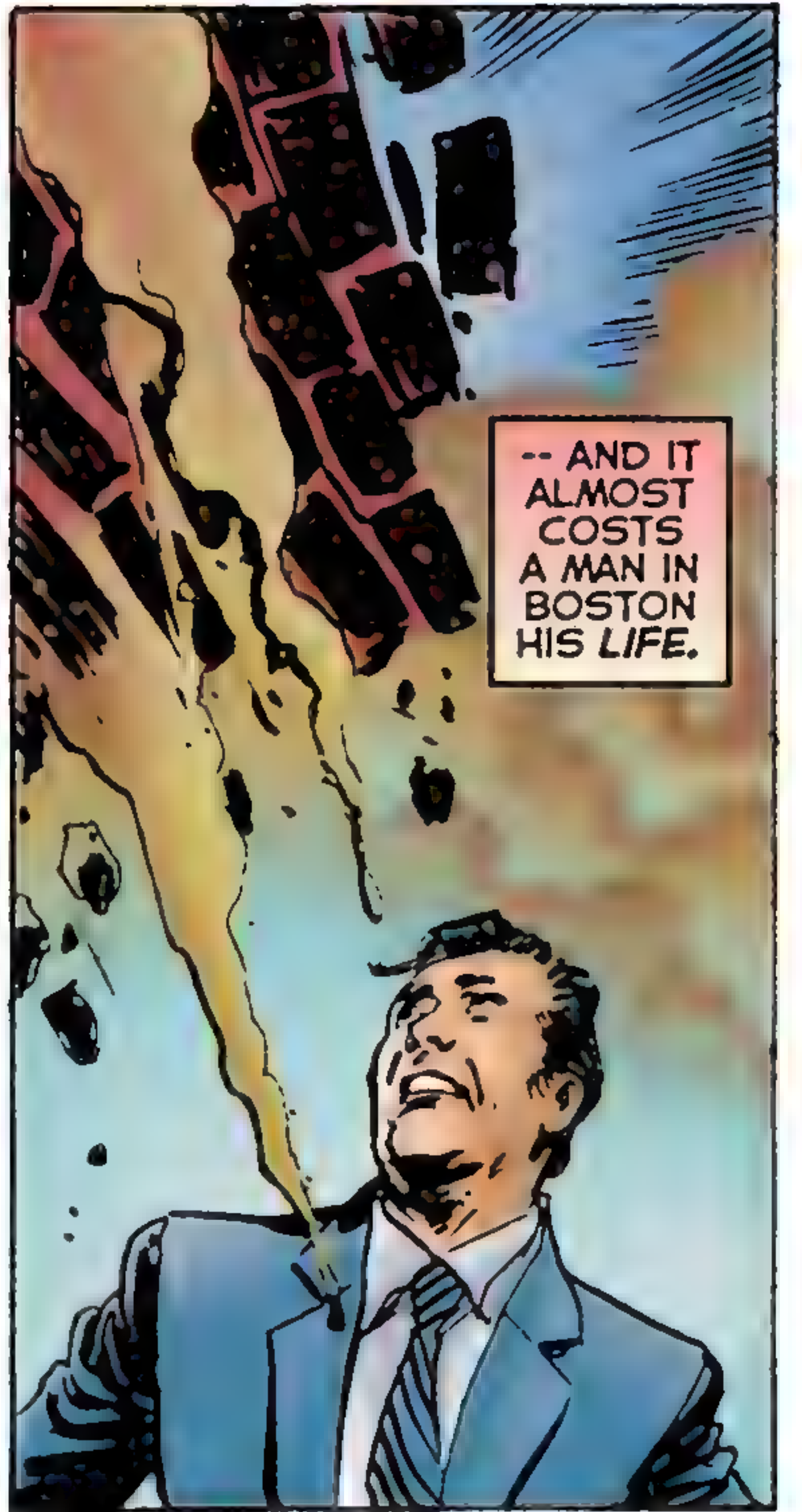
-- HELPING THE MARITIME
MUSEUM RAISE THE SEA
BLAZE, SUNK IN 1665
OFF THE FLORIDA COAST
(THREE SECONDS) --



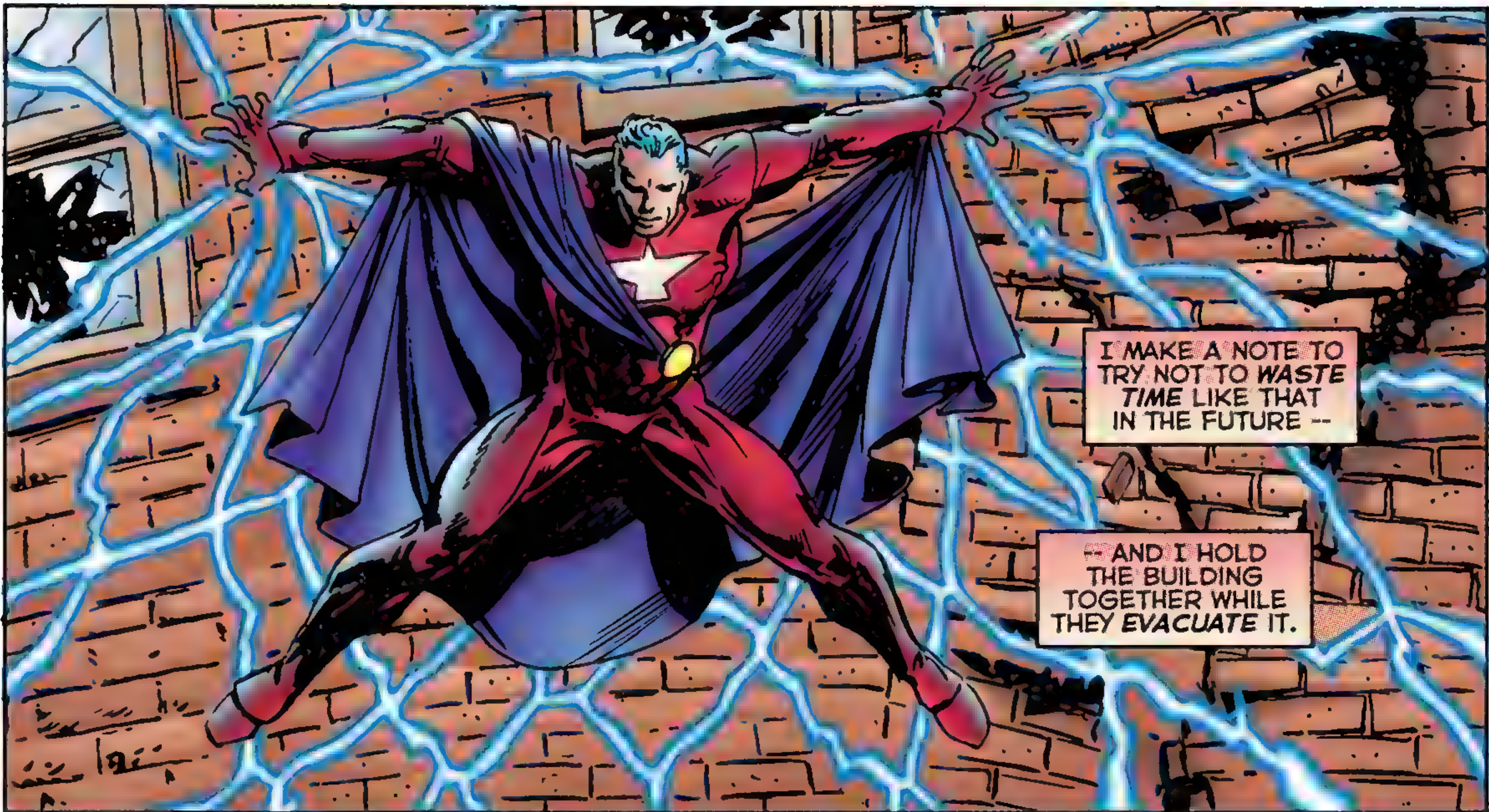
-- AND A
FRIGHTENED
LITTLE BALL OF
ORANGE AND
WHITE ON
CICERO STREET.



I SLOW DOWN (TWO SECONDS)
TO LET THE LITTLE GIRL SEE
ME CLEARLY AND REASSURE
HER THAT IT'S ALL RIGHT --

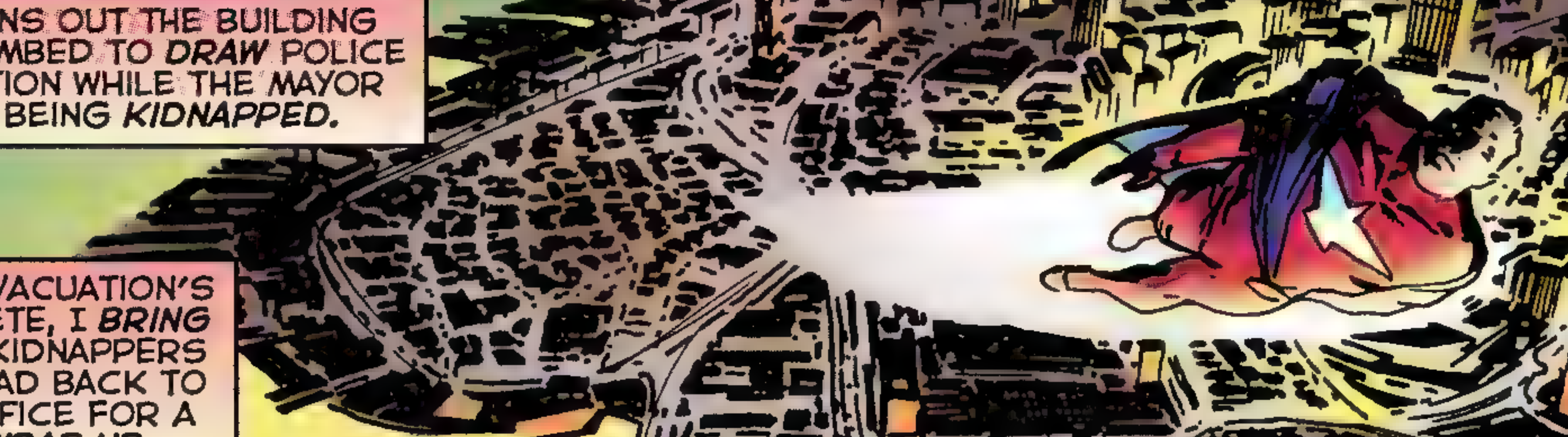


-- AND IT
ALMOST
COSTS
A MAN IN
BOSTON
HIS LIFE.



IT TURNS OUT THE BUILDING WAS BOMBED TO *DRAW* POLICE ATTENTION WHILE THE MAYOR WAS BEING *KIDNAPPED*.

ONCE EVACUATION'S COMPLETE, I *BRING* IN THE KIDNAPPERS AND HEAD BACK TO THE OFFICE FOR A LATE *WRAP-UP* --



-- AND IN TIME TO GET READY FOR DINNER.

-- WITH THE GREATEST HONOR, AND DEEPEST SENSE OF GRATITUDE, THAT I PRESENT THIS TOKEN OF OUR ESTEEM TO THE MAN WHO --

TONIGHT, IT'S THE FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION.

ACFA
PRESENTED BY THE
ASTRO CITY
FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION
WITH GREAT PLEASURE AND RESPECT TO
SAMANTHA
JUNE 17, 1995

I TRIED ONCE TO SIMPLY IGNORE THESE EVENTS, BUT IT OFFENDED PEOPLE --

-- GREAT HONOR. I THANK YOU, AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO MY BEST, FOR THE PEOPLE OF ASTRO CITY AND THE ENTIRE --

-- AS IF I WAS SAYING I WAS TOO GOOD FOR THEM.

ACFA

SO I SMILE,
AND EAT THE
CHICKEN --

CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP
CLAP CLAP

ACFA

-- AND EXCUSE
MYSELF *TWICE* DURING
DINNER TO DEAL
WITH CRISES.

-- AND EXCUSE MYSELF TWICE DURING DINNER TO DEAL WITH CRISES.



AFTERWARD, I SHAKE MY HOSTS' HANDS AND AUTOGRAPH HELMETS AND REITERATE THAT IT'S *THEY* WHO ARE THE TRUE HEROES --

-- AND THEY ARE, THERE'S NOT A SHRED OF DOUBT ABOUT THAT --



-- AND IN THE NEAREST ALLEYWAY, I LET MY MIND GO BLANK AND LET THE DAY'S TENSION DRAIN FROM MY BODY.

I REACH THE STATE OF CALM NECESSARY FOR THE SHIFT --



-- AND TAKE A STEP SIDWAYS.



THE "CLOSET" IS JUST AS I LEFT IT, EXCEPT FOR MORE MICROSPORE BUILDUP. IT MAY BE THE LOCAL EQUIVALENT OF HOUSE DUST --

-- BUT YOU NEVER KNOW. I'LL ASK THE N-FORCER ABOUT IT NEXT WEEK.

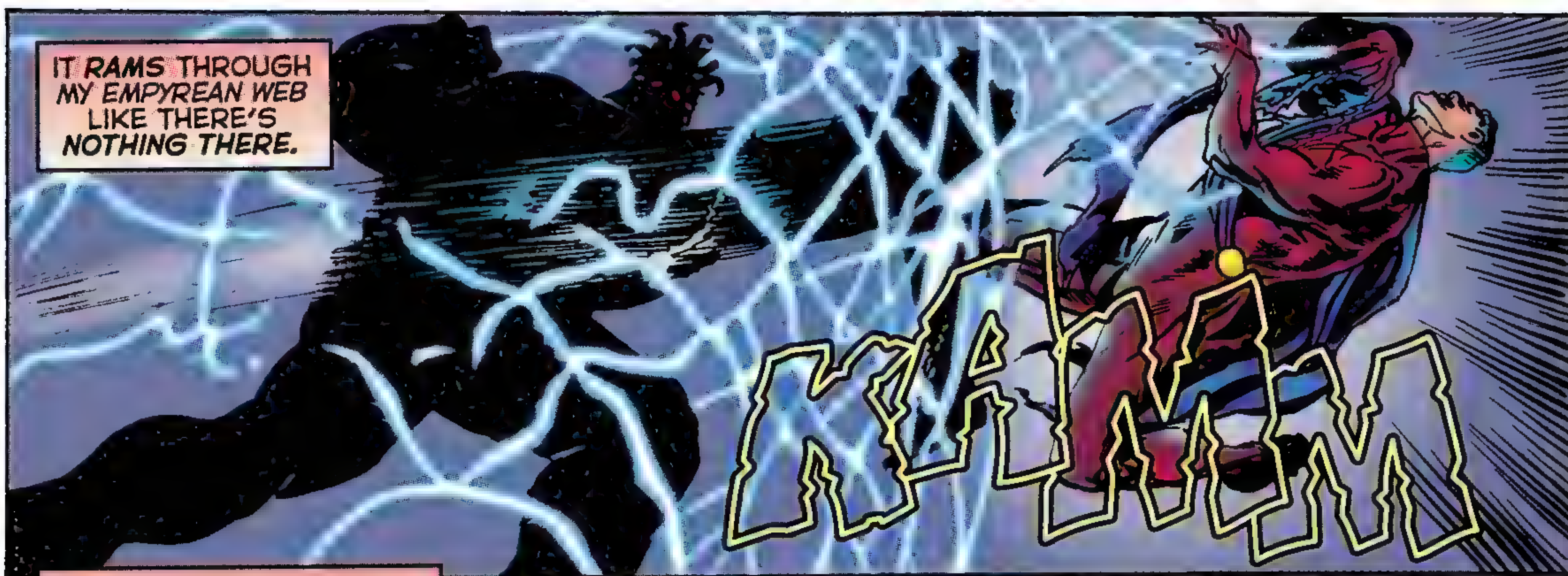


AND THAT SHOULD BE IT --

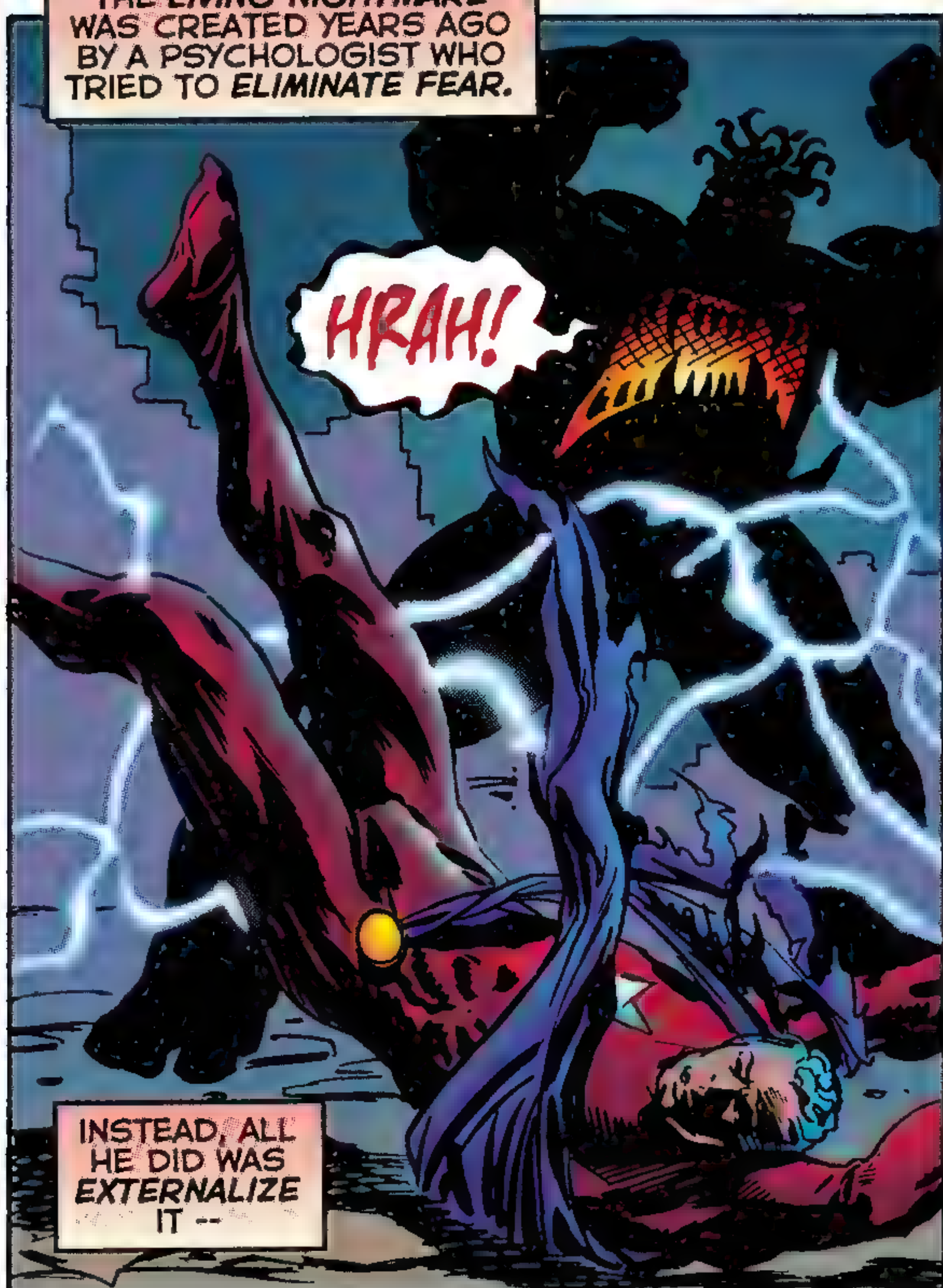
ACFA
PRESENTED BY THE
ASTRO CITY
FIREFIGHTERS ASSOCIATION
WITH GRATITUDE AND RESPECT, TO
SAMARITAN
AUGUST 8, 1995

-- EXCEPT IT
NEVER IS.





IT RAMS THROUGH
MY EMPYREAN WEB
LIKE THERE'S
NOTHING THERE.



THE LIVING NIGHTMARE
WAS CREATED YEARS AGO
BY A PSYCHOLOGIST WHO
TRIED TO ELIMINATE FEAR.

HRAH!

INSTEAD, ALL
HE DID WAS
EXTERNALIZE
IT --



HARR!

-- CREATING A
VIOLENT,
DESTRUCTIVE
CREATURE THAT
LASHES OUT AT
ANYTHING THAT
THREATENS IT.

WHUDD



OVER THE YEARS,
THE NIGHTMARE'S
TAKEN *MANY FORMS* --

-- EVEN TWICE, WITH
A *MARINE PILOT'S*
MIND SUPERSEDING
THE CREATURE'S
CONSCIOUSNESS,
BECOMING A MEMBER
OF *HONOR GUARD*.

THESE DAYS, IT'S IN
AN *EXCEPTIONALLY*
ANNOYING CONFIGURATION.



RUU?

IT APPEARS OUT
OF *NOWHERE* --

-- IT'S *DRAWN*
TO THE *SUPER-*
POWERED
BEINGS THAT
HAVE SO OFTEN
CONTAINED IT --

-- AND IT *LEECHES*
OFF OUR ENERGY,
SO THAT I CAN'T
HARM IT --

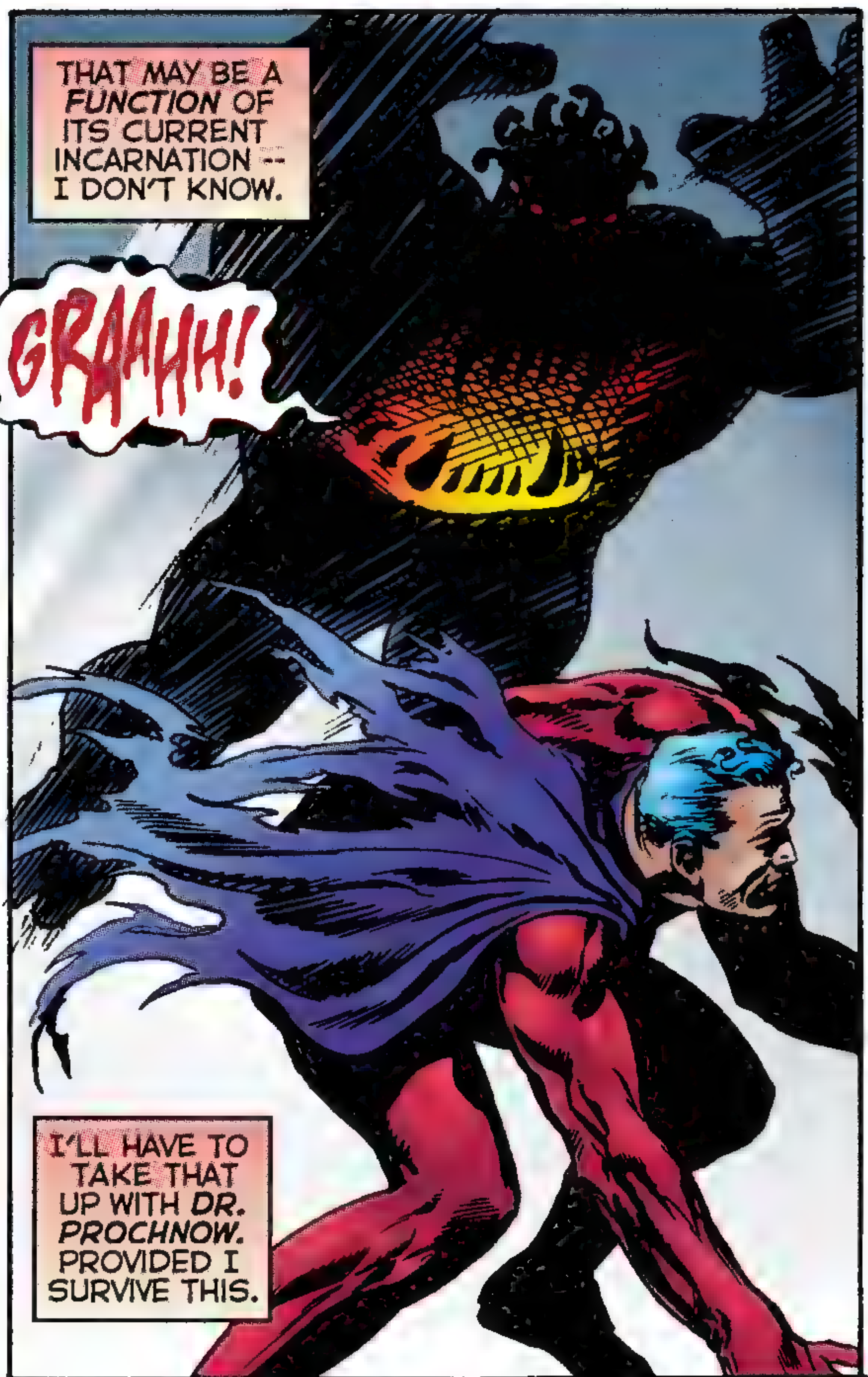


THAK

NF!

-- AND EVERY
TIME I HIT IT I
GROW *WEAKER*.

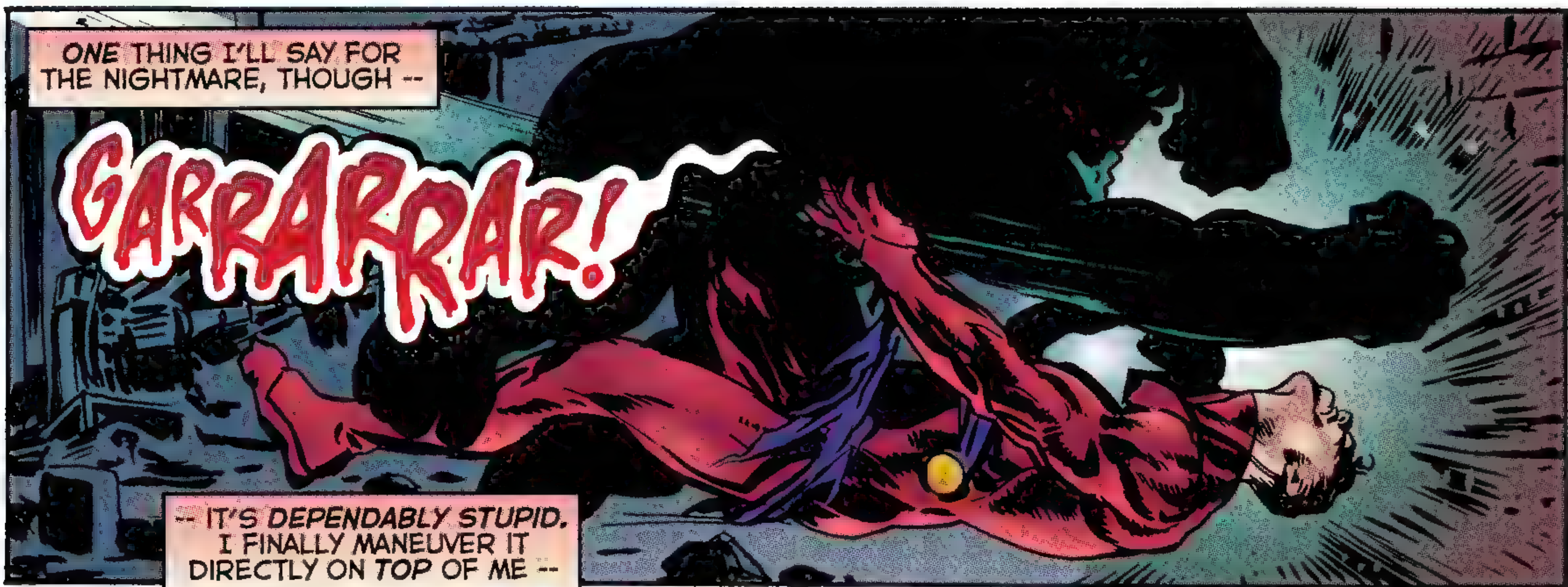
AND IT ALWAYS --
ALWAYS! -- ATTACKS
WHEN I'M *TIED*.



THAT MAY BE A
FUNCTION OF
ITS CURRENT
INCARNATION --
I DON'T KNOW.

GRAHH!

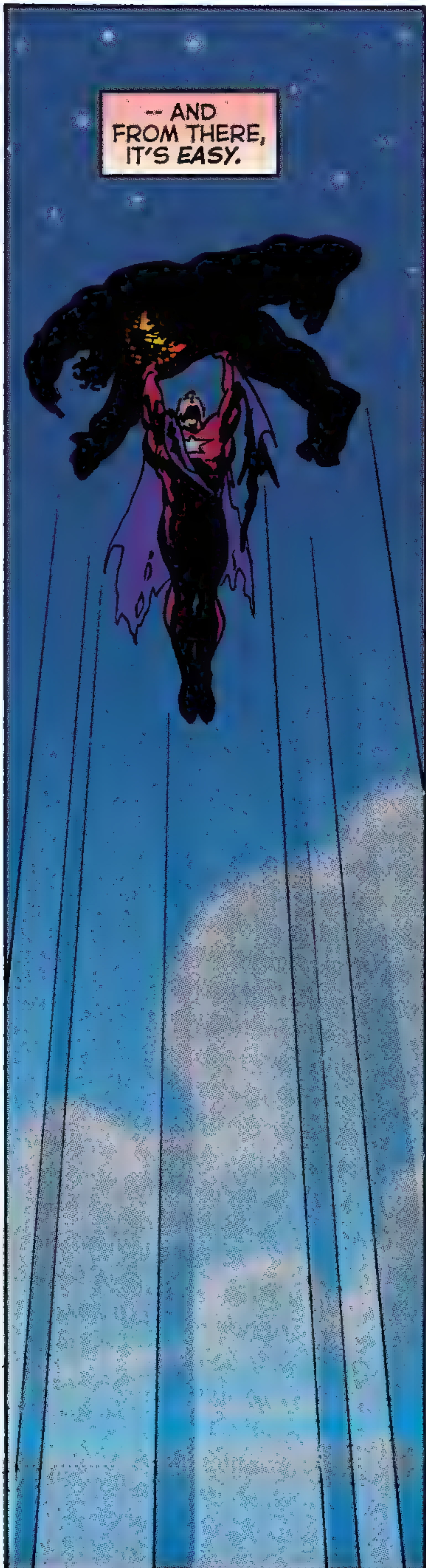
I'LL HAVE TO
TAKE THAT
UP WITH *DR.*
PROCHNOW.
PROVIDED I
SURVIVE THIS.



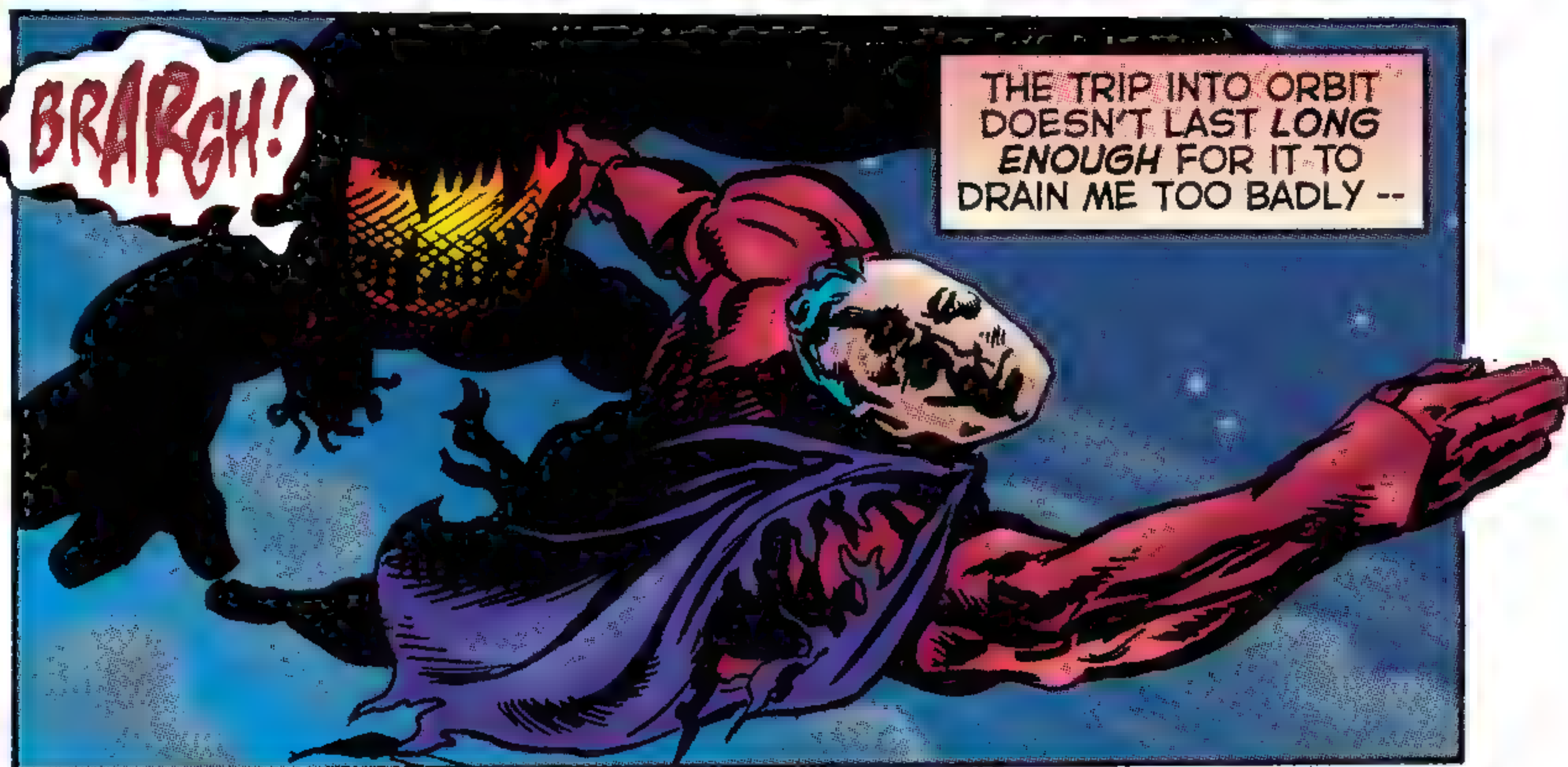
ONE THING I'LL SAY FOR THE NIGHTMARE, THOUGH --

GARRARRAR!

-- IT'S DEPENDABLY STUPID. I FINALLY MANEUVER IT DIRECTLY ON TOP OF ME --



-- AND FROM THERE, IT'S EASY.

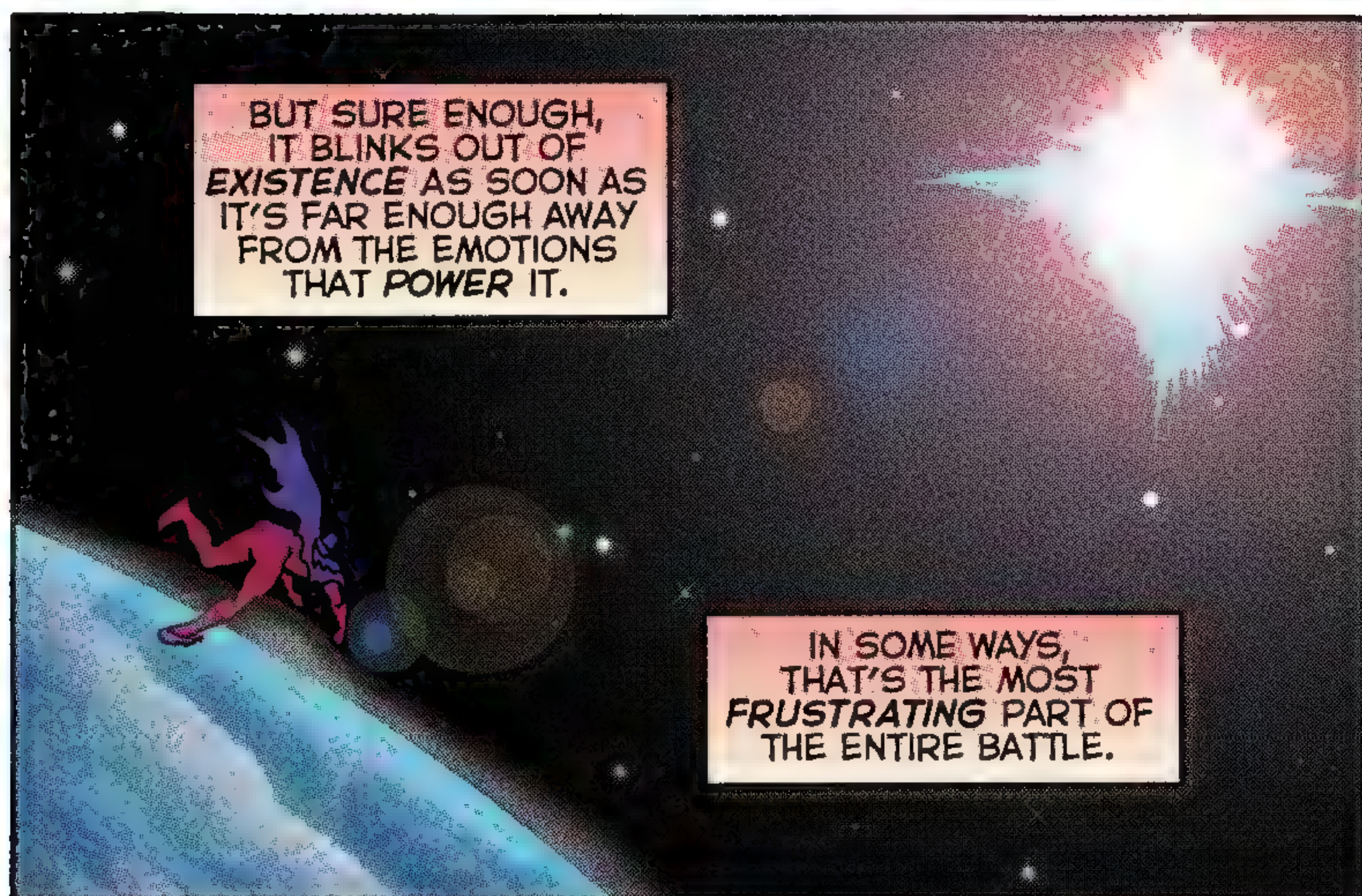


BRARGH!

THE TRIP INTO ORBIT DOESN'T LAST LONG ENOUGH FOR IT TO DRAIN ME TOO BADLY --



-- AND THERE'S NOTHING IT CAN HURT BETWEEN HERE AND THE SUN.



BUT SURE ENOUGH, IT BLINKS OUT OF EXISTENCE AS SOON AS IT'S FAR ENOUGH AWAY FROM THE EMOTIONS THAT POWER IT.

IN SOME WAYS, THAT'S THE MOST FRUSTRATING PART OF THE ENTIRE BATTLE.

I'D LIKE TO TAKE
MY *TIME* HEADING
BACK. I'M BRUISED,
EXHAUSTED, AND
EARTH IS SO LOVELY
BY STARLIGHT.

BUT THERE'S *PROPERTY*
DAMAGE TO DEAL WITH,
A GAS MAIN TO REPAIR,
WOUNDED TO ATTEND
TO AND MORE.

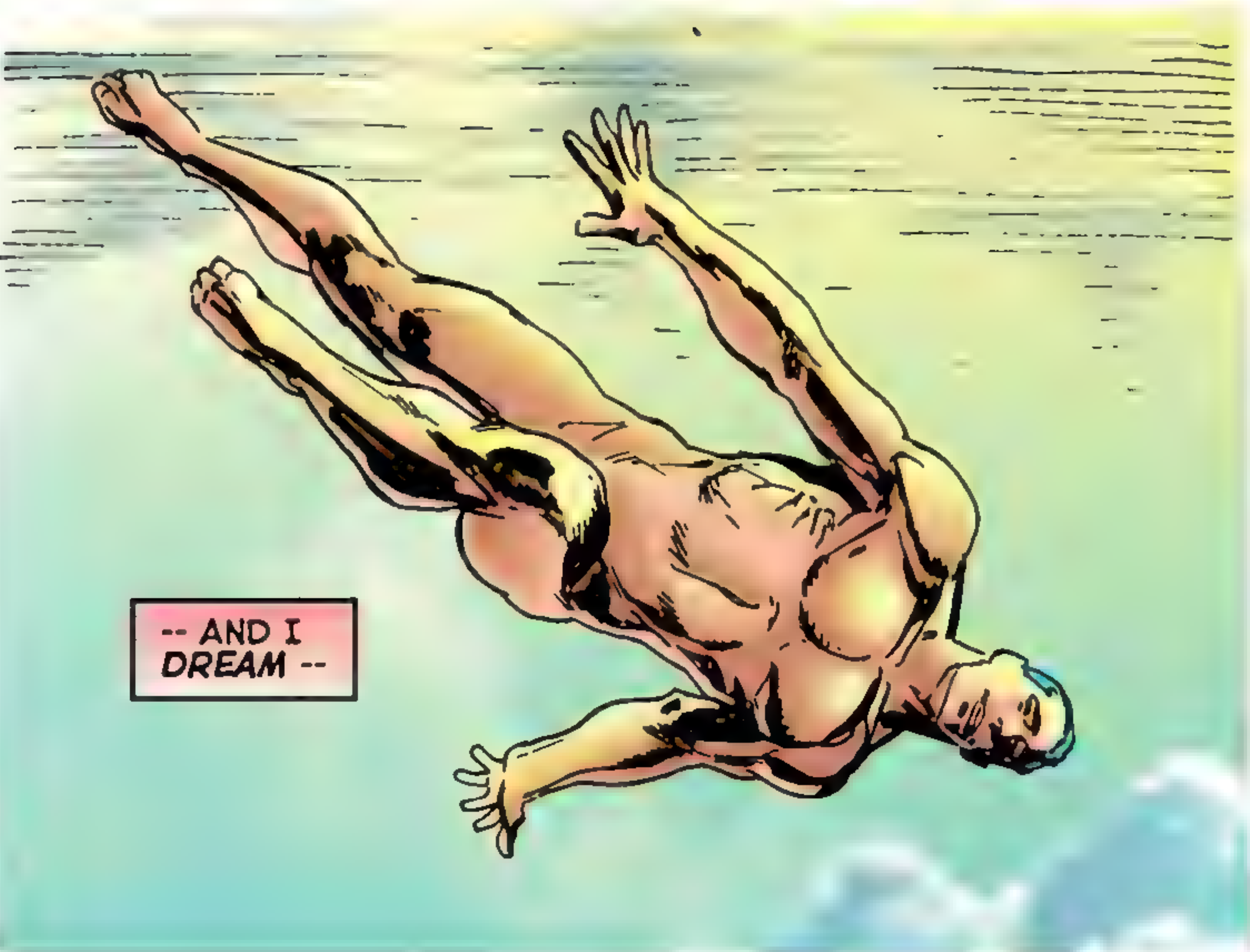
IT'S PAST ONE A.M. BY
THE TIME I GET BACK
TO MY APARTMENT.

I TALLY
UP THE
DAY.

FIFTY-SIX SECONDS. BEST
DAY SINCE MARCH.

I'M SLIPPING
AWAY BEFORE
MY HEAD HITS
THE PILLOW.

AND I
SLEEP --





-- AND I
FLY.

YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY







"THE SALARY'S ACCEPTABLE, THEN?"

ROCKET!

GETCHER MORNING ROCKET!

ASTRO CITY
Samaritan Checks
Nightmare Rampage
Damage Contained
No Deaths

ASTRO CITY ROCKET
Samaritan Checks
Nightmare Rampage
Damage Contained
No Deaths



UH, YES -- YES, IT'S FINE.

GOOD. THEN WELCOME TO THE ASTRO CITY ROCKET, SON. I EXPECT GREAT THINGS FROM YOU.

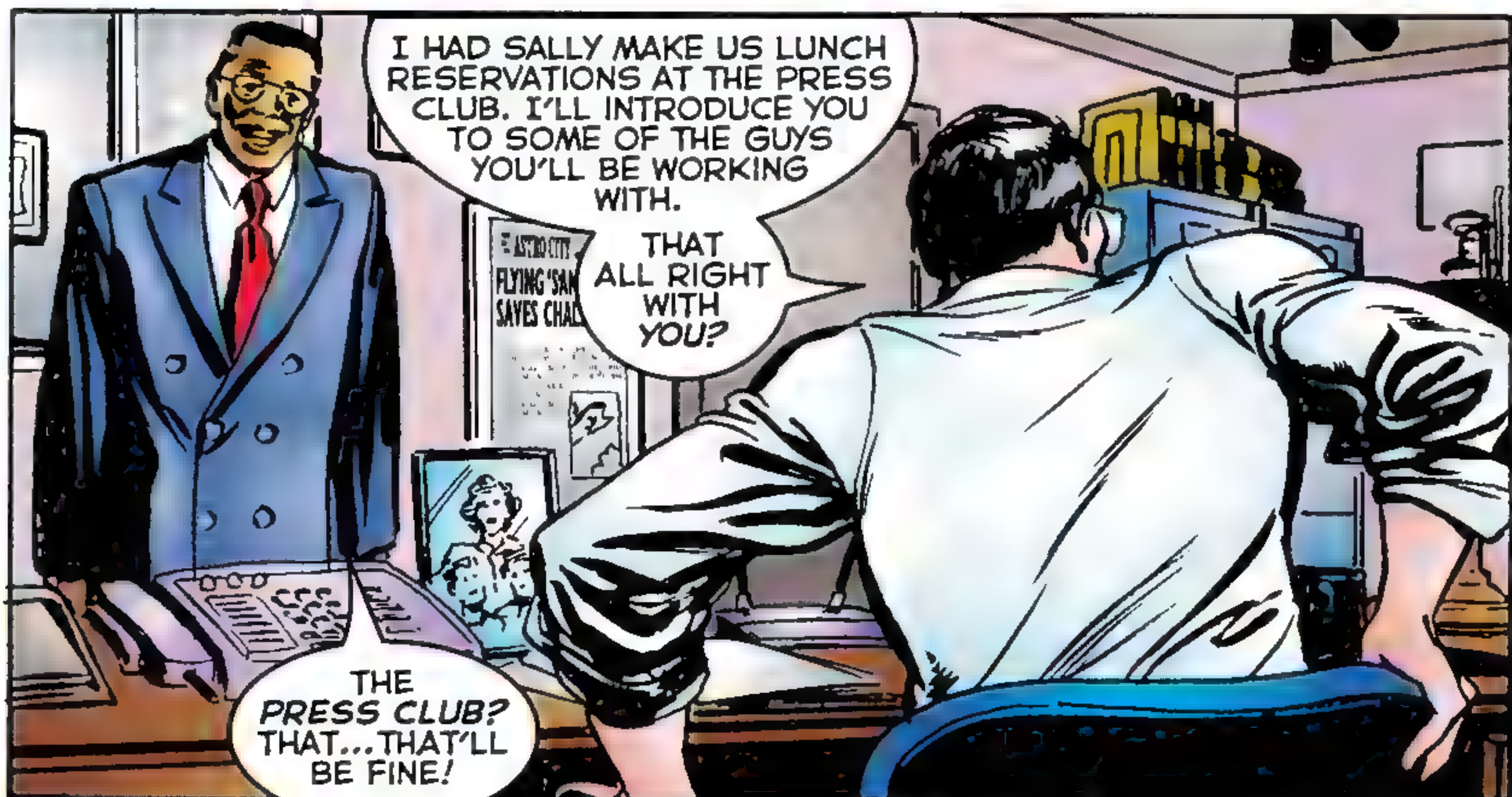


I'LL TRY TO LIVE UP TO THAT, MISTER MILLS.

PLEASE, IT'S ELLIOT. I'M ONLY "MISTER MILLS" WHEN YOU'VE DONE SOMETHING WRONG.

UH, YES SIR, MISTER-- I MEAN, ELLIOT.

DON'T WORRY, KID. I'M NOT GOING TO BITE YOU.



I HAD SALLY MAKE US LUNCH RESERVATIONS AT THE PRESS CLUB. I'LL INTRODUCE YOU TO SOME OF THE GUYS YOU'LL BE WORKING WITH.

THAT ALL RIGHT WITH YOU?

THE PRESS CLUB? THAT... THAT'LL BE FINE!



GOOD. WE'VE GOT A FEW MINUTES BEFORE IT'S TIME TO HEAD DOWN, THEN.

RELAX. LOOSEN YOUR TIE, MAYBE -- YOU LOOK LIKE YOU'RE CHOKING.

THANK YOU, SIR.



"IT WAS 1959. A DOZEN YEARS SINCE THE CITY WAS **REBUILT** AND **RENAMED**, TWO YEARS PAST **SPUTNIK** AND STILL A YEAR OR TWO UNTIL **JFK** WOULD KILL THE **HAT** FOR **MEN**.

"THE **LAMPLIGHTER** AND THE **ALL-AMERICAN** HAD JUST ANNOUNCED THEIR RETIREMENT, BUT IT DIDN'T FEEL LIKE AN **ENDING**.

"IT FELT LIKE SOMETHING WAS **BEGINNING** --

"-- AND THERE WAS NOWHERE IN THE **WORLD** I'D RATHER HAVE BEEN THAN IN **ASTRO CITY**."

the
scoop

"I WAS A LOT LIKE YOU -- A KID RIGHT OUT OF JOURNALISM SCHOOL, NEW TO THE CITY. I HAD A NEW JOB -- A GIRL --

"-- AND THE WORLD AROUND ME WAS FRESH AND VITAL, THERE WAS SPIRIT, AND COMMUNITY --

38-469
1959

"-- A SENSE THAT WE WERE ALL PULLING TOGETHER. FOR THE SPACE RACE -- FOR DEMOCRACY --

"-- WHATEVER WAS GOING ON IN THE WORLD --

"WE WERE A PART OF IT --"

WHAT?!

WHO --?

PKAF

PKAF

PKAF



"-- AND SO WAS HE."

THAT'S FAR ENOUGH.

I DON'T THINK THAT MONEY BELONGS TO YOU FELLAS.

"THE SILVER AGENT. THE POOR, DOOMED SILVER AGENT.

"TO YOU, HE'S HISTORY. HE WAS GONE BEFORE YOU WERE EVEN BORN.

"BUT HE'D BEEN AROUND FOR ONLY THREE YEARS THEN, AND NONE OF US KNEW WHAT WAS COMING.



"ALL WE KNEW WAS HIS YOUTH AND CONFIDENCE --

"-- THE WAY HE SYMBOLIZED SOMETHING WE ALL FELT.

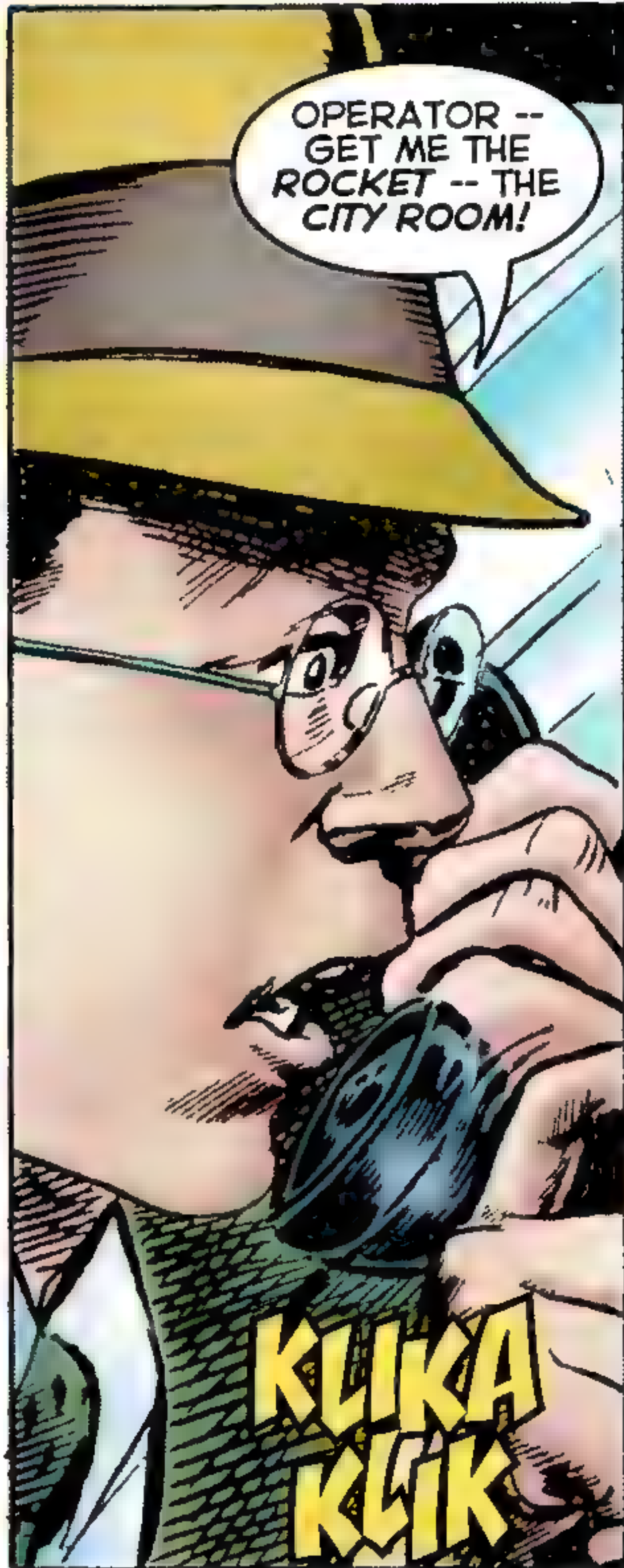
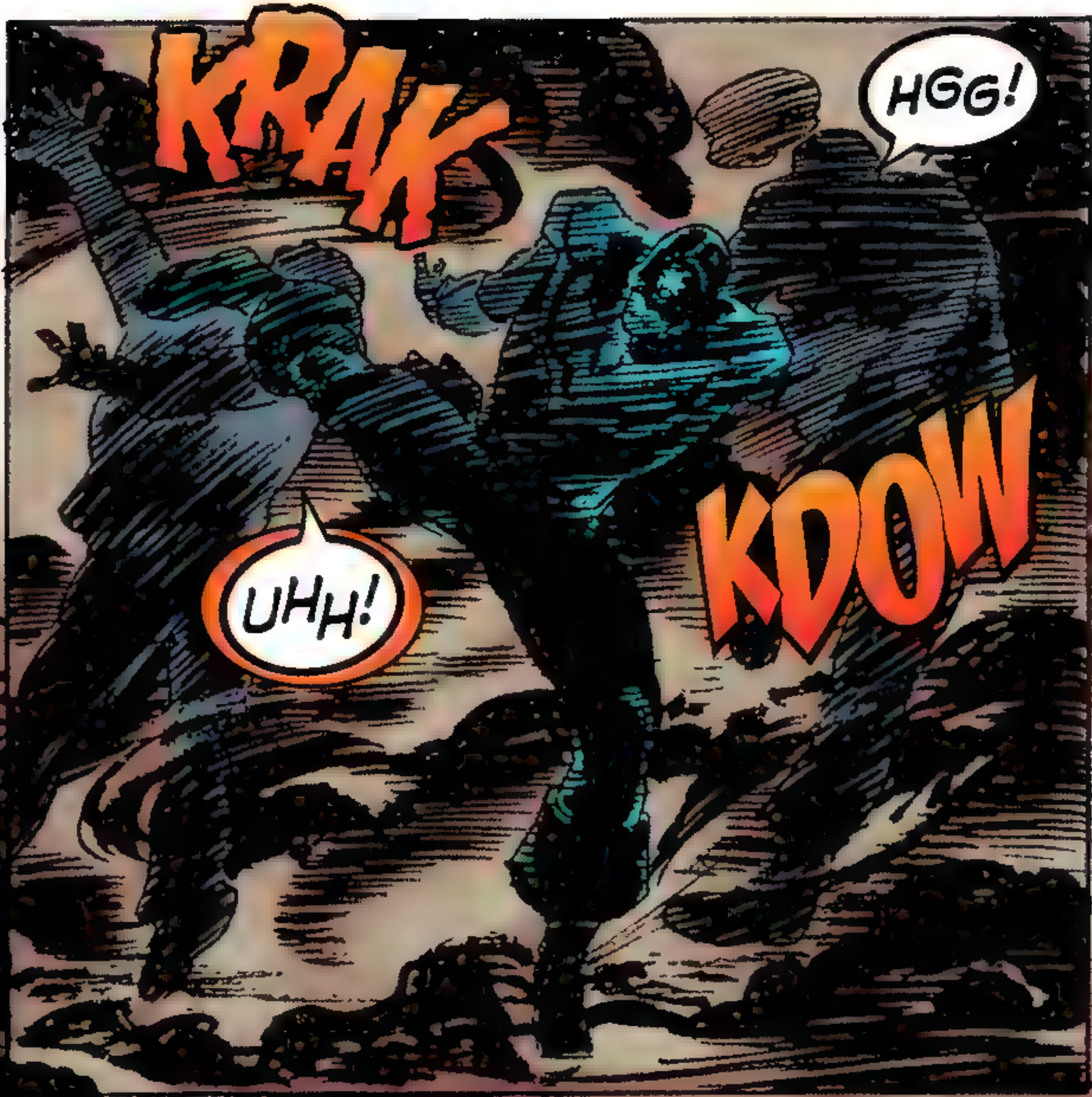
"THE PHRASE 'THE BEST AND THE BRIGHTEST' HADN'T BEEN COINED YET, BUT THAT'S WHAT HE WAS. OUR BEST. OUR BRIGHTEST.

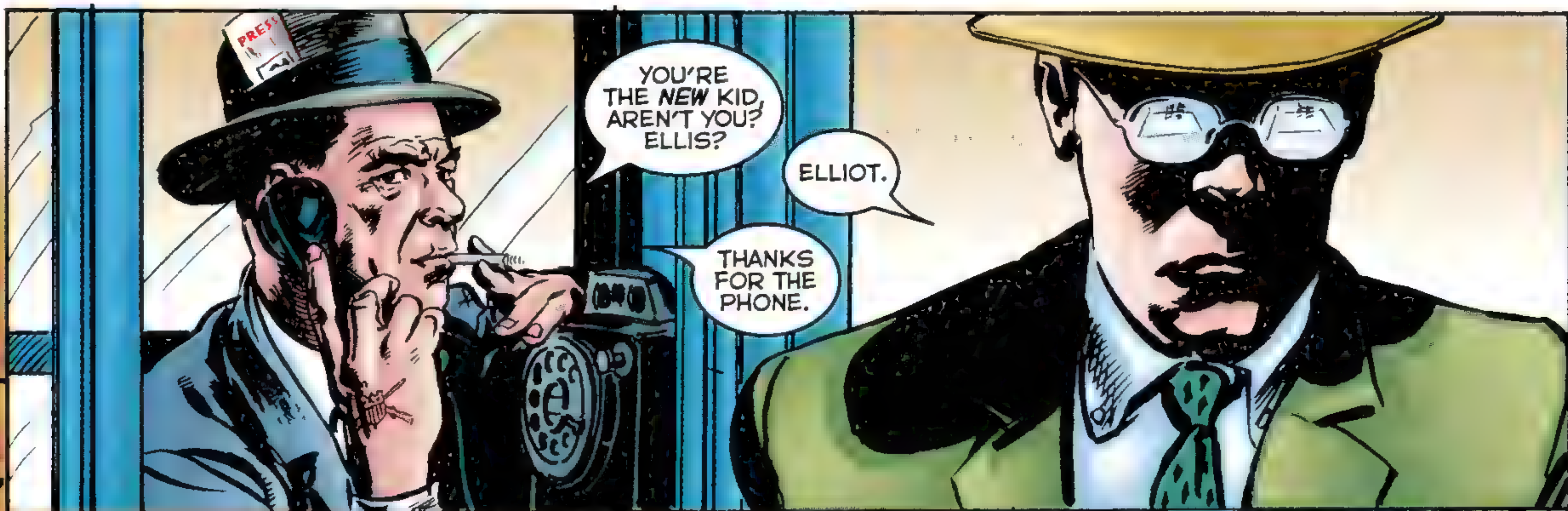


"A NEW HERO FOR A NEW ERA."

SHAM

KUDO





YOU'RE THE NEW KID, AREN'T YOU? ELLIS?

ELLIOT.

THANKS FOR THE PHONE.

"THE DEADLINE'S HISTORY, TOO -- GONE THE WAY OF THE CHAIN-SMOKING, HARD-DRINKING REPORTER --"

THE DEADLINE

THE DEADLINE

YOUR FIRST WEEK, AND YOU ALREADY WANT THE FRONT PAGE?

"COMPLIMENTARY" TYPEWRITERS

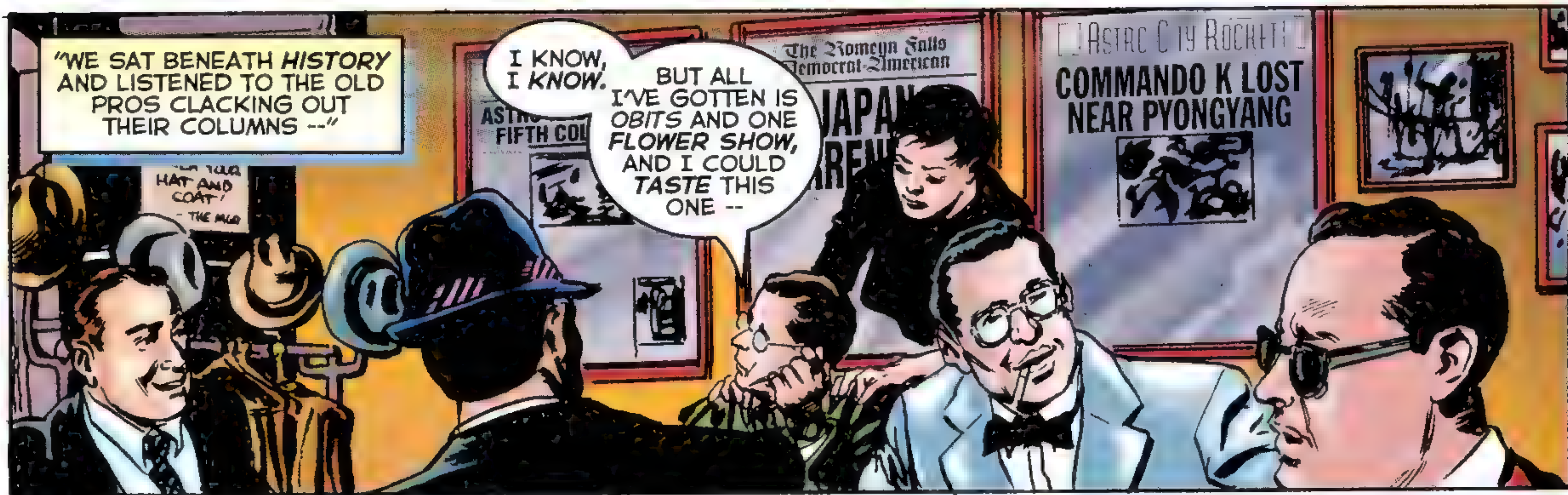
LOOK, MESKIN HAD SENIORITY -- AND HE WAS IN THAT BANK --



"-- BUT IT WAS OUR HOME BACK THEN."

-- IT WAS HIS STORY, I KNOW.

THE OLD MAN WOULD HAVE JUST HAD REWRITE GET THE GOODS FROM YOU ANYWAY -- YOU WOULDN'T HAVE GOTTEN A BYLINE.

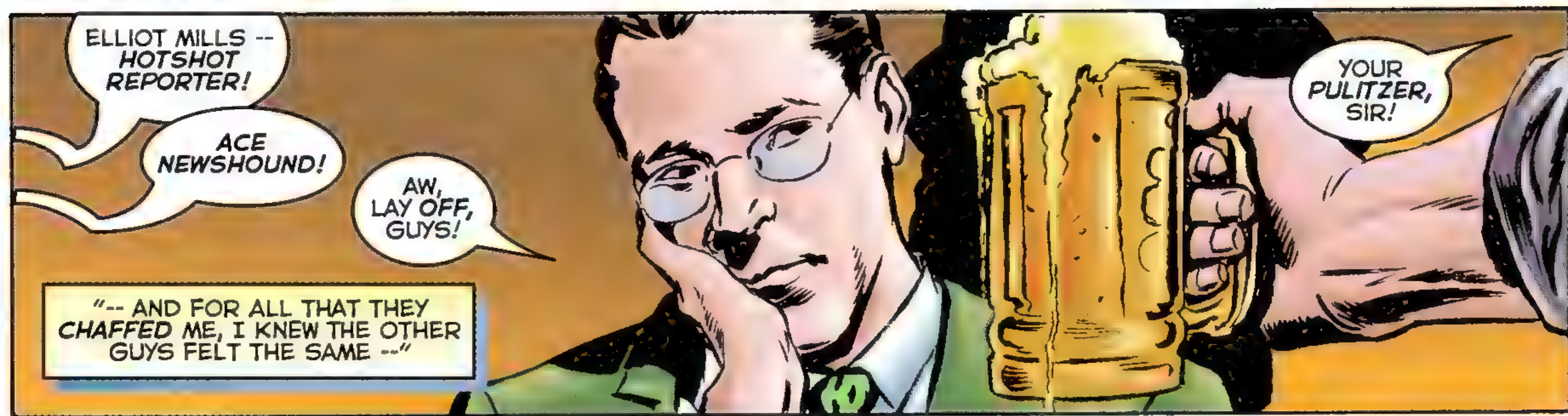


"WE SAT BENEATH HISTORY AND LISTENED TO THE OLD PROS CLACKING OUT THEIR COLUMNS --"

I KNOW, I KNOW.

BUT ALL I'VE GOTTEN IS OBIT'S AND ONE FLOWER SHOW, AND I COULD TASTE THIS ONE --

ASTRO CITY ROCKET!
COMMANDO K LOST NEAR PYONGYANG



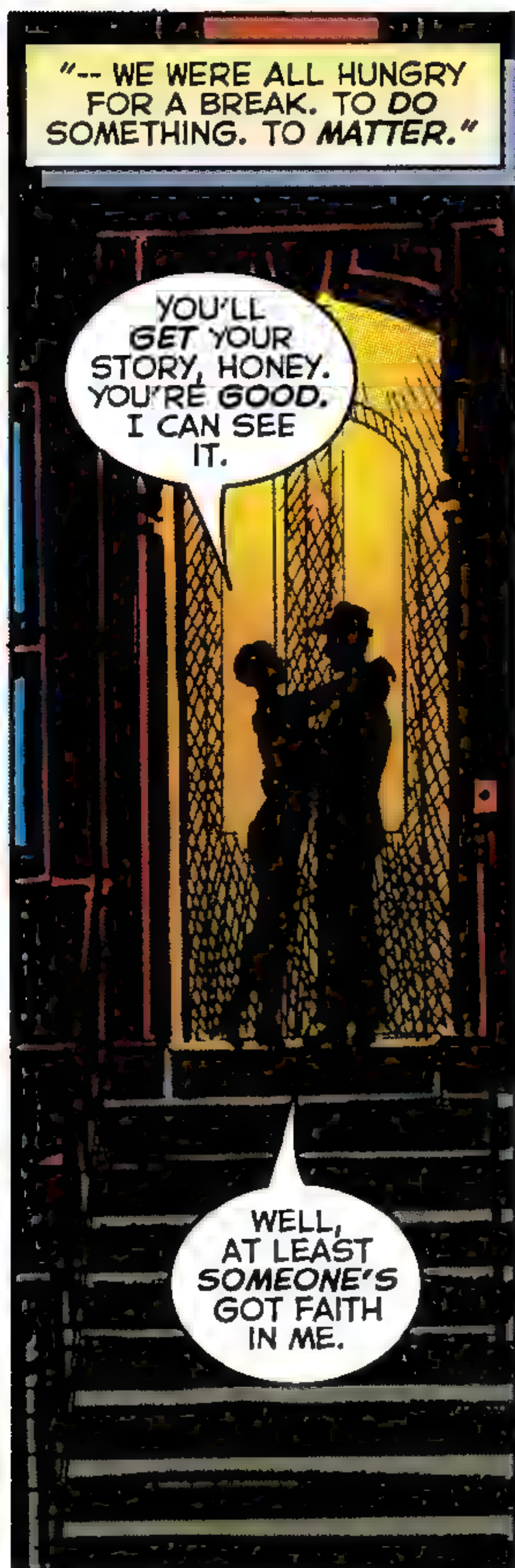
ELLIOT MILLS -- HOTSHOT REPORTER!

ACE NEWSHOUND!

AW, LAY OFF, GUYS!

YOUR PULITZER, SIR!

"-- AND FOR ALL THAT THEY CHAFED ME, I KNEW THE OTHER GUYS FELT THE SAME --"



"-- WE WERE ALL HUNGRY FOR A BREAK. TO DO SOMETHING. TO **MATTER.**"

YOU'LL GET YOUR STORY, HONEY. YOU'RE GOOD. I CAN SEE IT.

WELL, AT LEAST SOMEONE'S GOT FAITH IN ME.



I'D SNEAK YOU UP, BUT I'VE GOT AN **EARLY AUDITION** TOMORROW.

ANOTHER RADIO JINGLE, OR A SOAP THIS TIME?

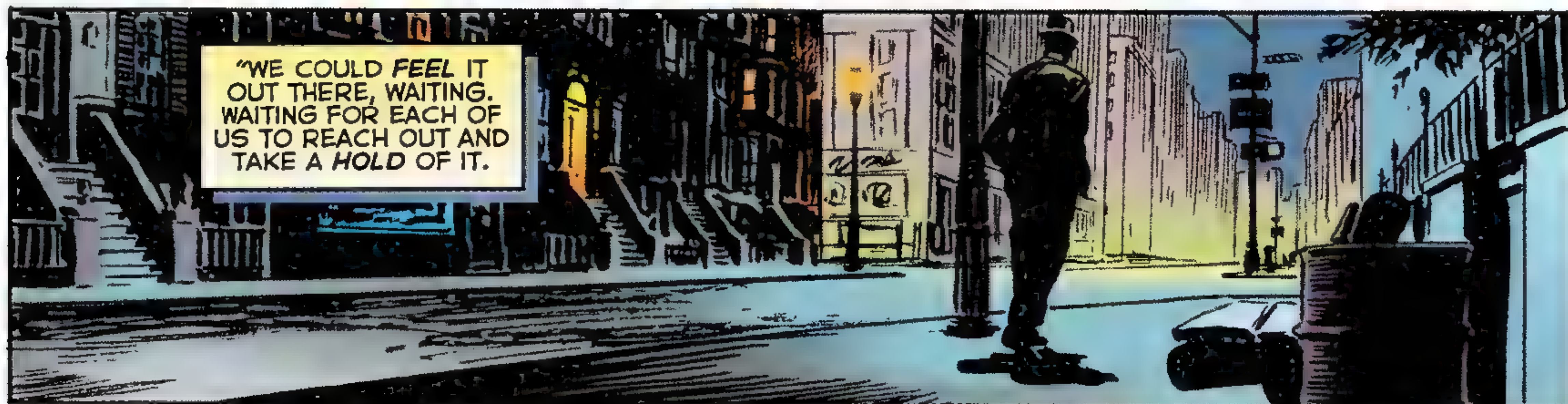
NO, A PLAY -- A **REAL PLAY!**



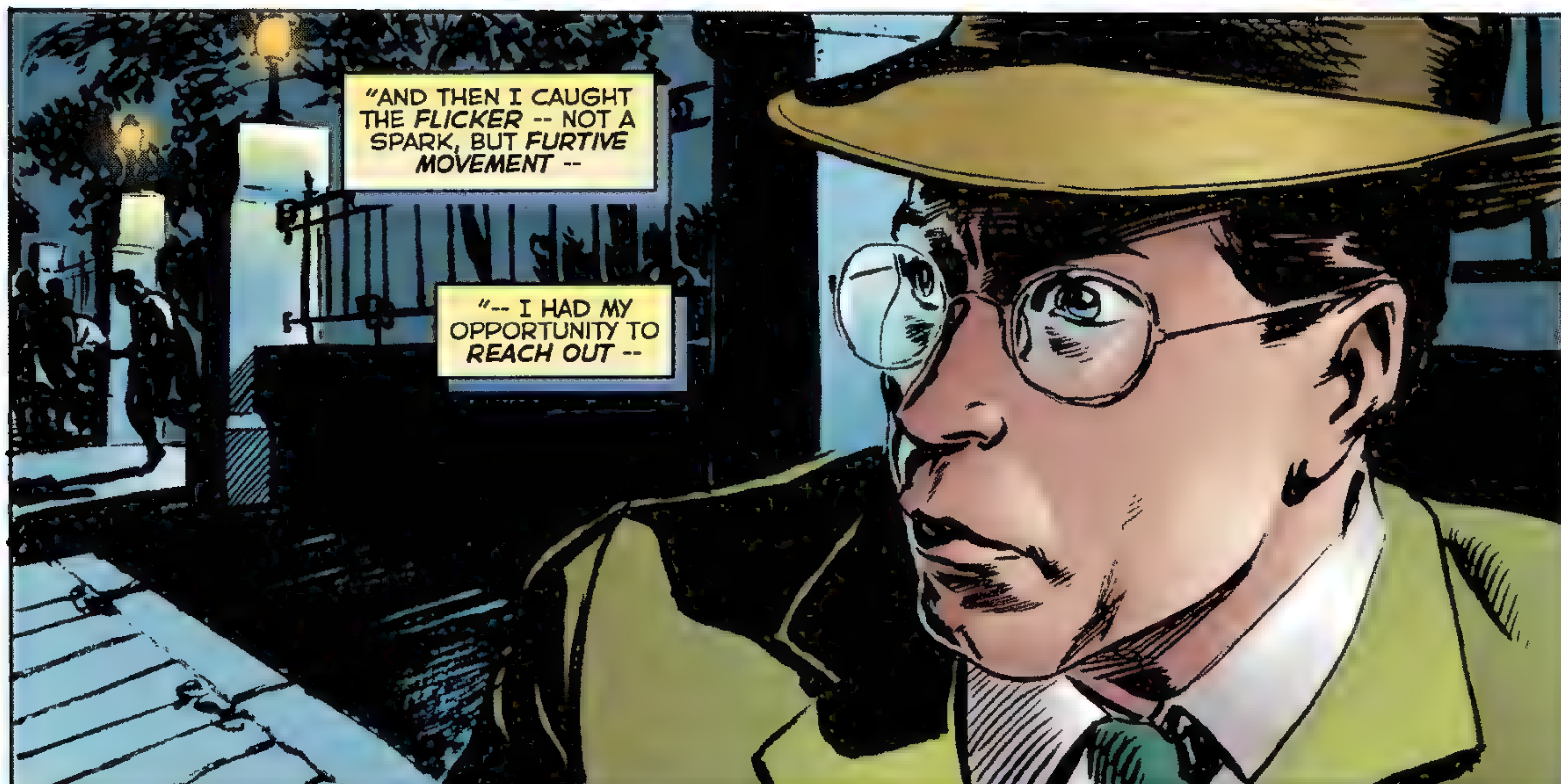
THEY'VE GOT NO **MONEY**, OF COURSE -- THEY'RE PUTTING IT ON IN A COFFEEHOUSE --

-- BUT OH, YOU SHOULD SEE THE **SCRIPT!**

"IT WAS LIKE **ELECTRICITY** OR SOMETHING -- FOR ALL OF US.



"WE COULD FEEL IT OUT THERE, WAITING. WAITING FOR EACH OF US TO REACH OUT AND TAKE A **HOLD** OF IT.



"AND THEN I CAUGHT THE **FLICKER** -- NOT A SPARK, BUT **FURTIVE MOVEMENT** --

"-- I HAD MY OPPORTUNITY TO **REACH OUT** --



"-- AND I TOOK IT. I DUCKED INTO THE SHADOWS AND FOLLOWED.

"I'D HAD A FEW THAT NIGHT, BUT MY MIND WAS CLEAR, AND I KNEW WHAT I WAS SEEING.



"ROBED MEN -- LIKE MONKS OR SOMETHING. DEFINITELY A STORY -- A BIGGER STORY THAN A FLOWER SHOW, AT ANY RATE.

"THE MEN WERE CAUTIOUS. QUIET. THEY OBVIOUSLY DIDN'T WANT TO BE SEEN --



"-- AND NO WONDER!"

THE ALTAR -- THERE!

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE TRACKS?

THERE WON'T BE A TRAIN FOR ANOTHER SIX MINUTES, ACOLYTE -- MORE THAN ENOUGH TIME!

NOW SILENCE -- I BEGIN!



By the power of the dark heart -- of blood and bone crushed to powder --

-- by the power of the killing fish --



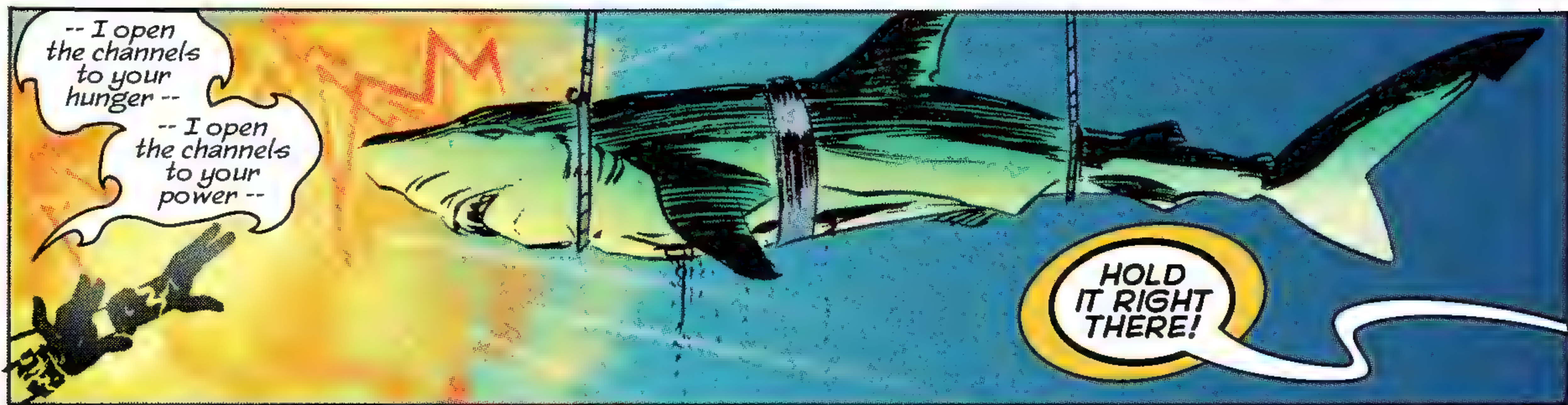
-- the great fish that never rests, whose hunger is never sated --

-- by the power of the relentless destroyer --



-- I call on you, O mighty one --

-- I call to you across the gulf of worlds and the tides of space --



-- I open
the channels
to your
hunger --

-- I open
the channels
to your
power --

HOLD
IT RIGHT
THERE!



I DON'T KNOW
IF WHAT YOU'RE
TRYING WOULD
EVEN WORK,
KARNUS --

-- BUT
I'D JUST
AS SOON
NOT FIND
OUT!

THE
SILVER
AGENT!

"DEFINITELY A
STORY -- MY
STORY THIS
TIME --"



CURSES! WE'RE
UNDONE!

WE ARE FAR FROM
DEFEATED, ACOLYTE!
THERE IS NO TIME
FOR THE AGENT TO
STOP US!

I open
the channels
to your
world --



-- and I
make our
separate
currents
one!



"-- BUT MORE
THAN I'D
BARGAINED
FOR.

"ALL OF A
SUDDEN --
THE TUNNEL,
THE TRACKS,
WERE GONE.
WE WERE
SOMEWHERE
ELSE --

"-- AND IN THE
PRESENCE OF
SOMETHING
ELSE "

I THANK YOU,
KARNUS. YOUR
WORLD IS NOW
WITHIN STRIKING
DISTANCE.

YOU AND
YOUR MINNOWS
HAVE SERVED
ME WELL --

-- AND YOU
SHALL NOT GO
UNREWARDED!

TAKE MY
POWER UNTO YOU --
TAKE MY HUNGER
AS YOUR OWN --

-- AND
RISE --

-- RISE AS
THE NEWEST
RAVAGERS IN
THE ARMY OF
**SHIRAK THE
DEVOURER!**

YOUR ARMY'S NOT
GOING ANYWHERE
EXCEPT THE
STOCKADE,
CHUM!

BRAVE
TALK, LITTLE
SILVER-SCALED
MACKEREL --

-- BUT
YOU CANNOT HOPE
TO PREVAIL AGAINST
SHIRAK'S ARMY ALONE!

COULD
BE YOU'RE
RIGHT,
SHIRAK --



-- GOOD
THING I
DIDN'T COME
ALONE.

"THE HONOR GUARD. IT HAD
ONLY BEEN A FEW WEEKS
SINCE THEY'D BEEN FORMED --
SINCE MAX O'MILLIONS HAD
RALLIED THE WORLD'S
GREATEST HEROES, OLD AND
NEW, AGAINST THE LEGIONS
OF MIDNIGHT. WE DIDN'T
EVEN KNOW IF THEY'D BE
STAYING TOGETHER.

"BUT THERE THEY WERE,
RALLIED AROUND THE
AGENT: MAX, CLEOPATRA,
LEOPARDMAN AND
KITKAT, STARWOMAN,
THE N-FORCER...

"...EVEN THE
BOUNCING BEATNIK
WAS THERE..."



"THE SHARK-MEN BOILED UP THE RISE -- SNARLING, VICIOUS -- YOU'D HAVE THOUGHT NOTHING COULD HAVE STOPPED THEM.



"BUT THE HEROES MET THE CHARGE.

"MET IT --

"--- AND DROVE IT BACK!"



CRAZY, DADDY-O, CRAZY!

BEATNIK! QUIT CLOWNING AROUND AND GET THE JOB DONE! WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR YOUR FOOLISHNESS!



FOR A CAT, CAT, YOU'RE MOST UNCOOL! THIS SCENE IS SO SQUARE IT'S CUBED!

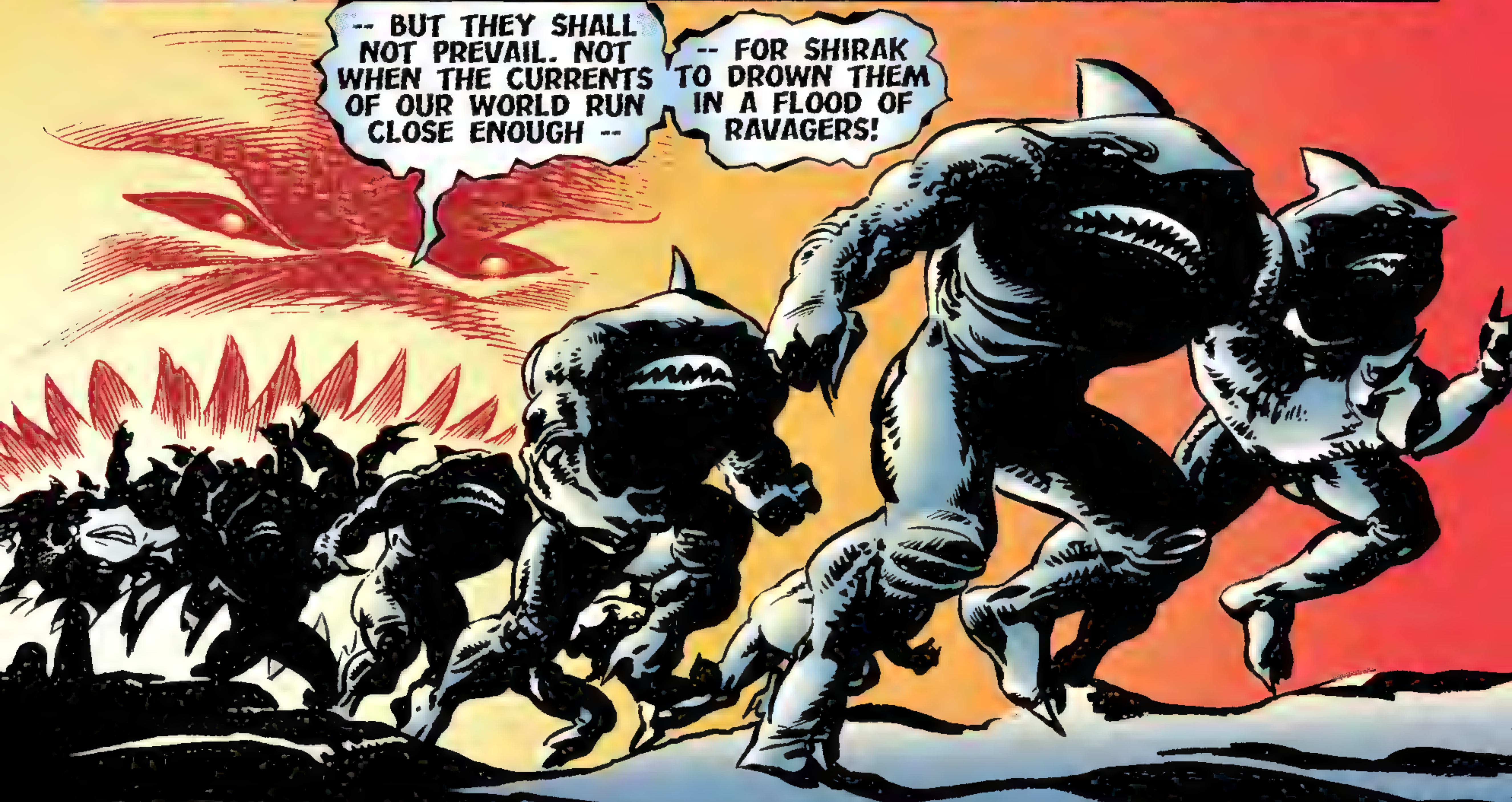
LIKE, DULLSVILLE!

KRAKK



-- BUT THEY SHALL NOT PREVAIL. NOT WHEN THE CURRENTS OF OUR WORLD RUN CLOSE ENOUGH --

-- FOR SHIRAK TO DROWN THEM IN A FLOOD OF RAVAGERS!



M-MY POWER PYRAMID! THERE ARE SO MANY OF THEM --

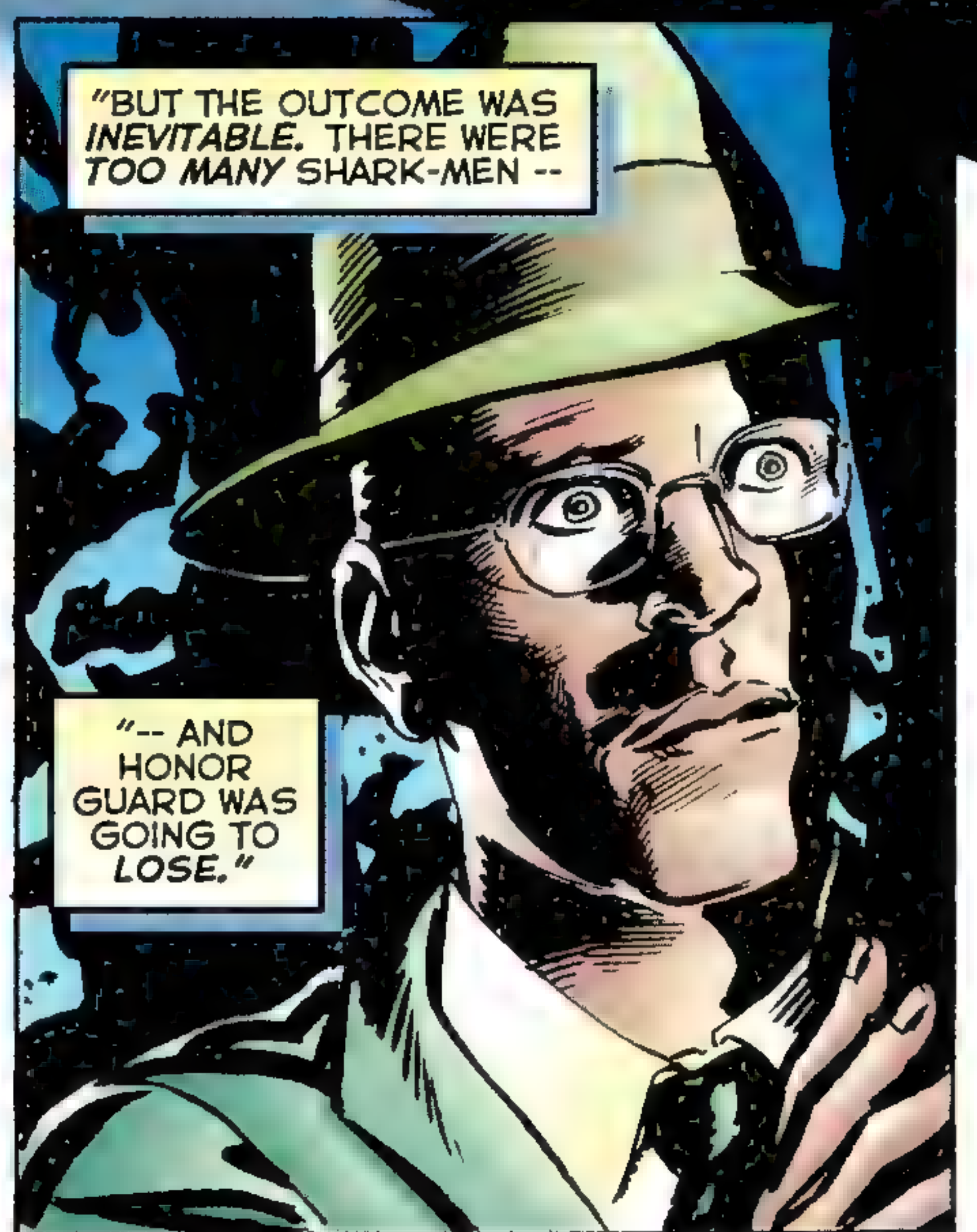
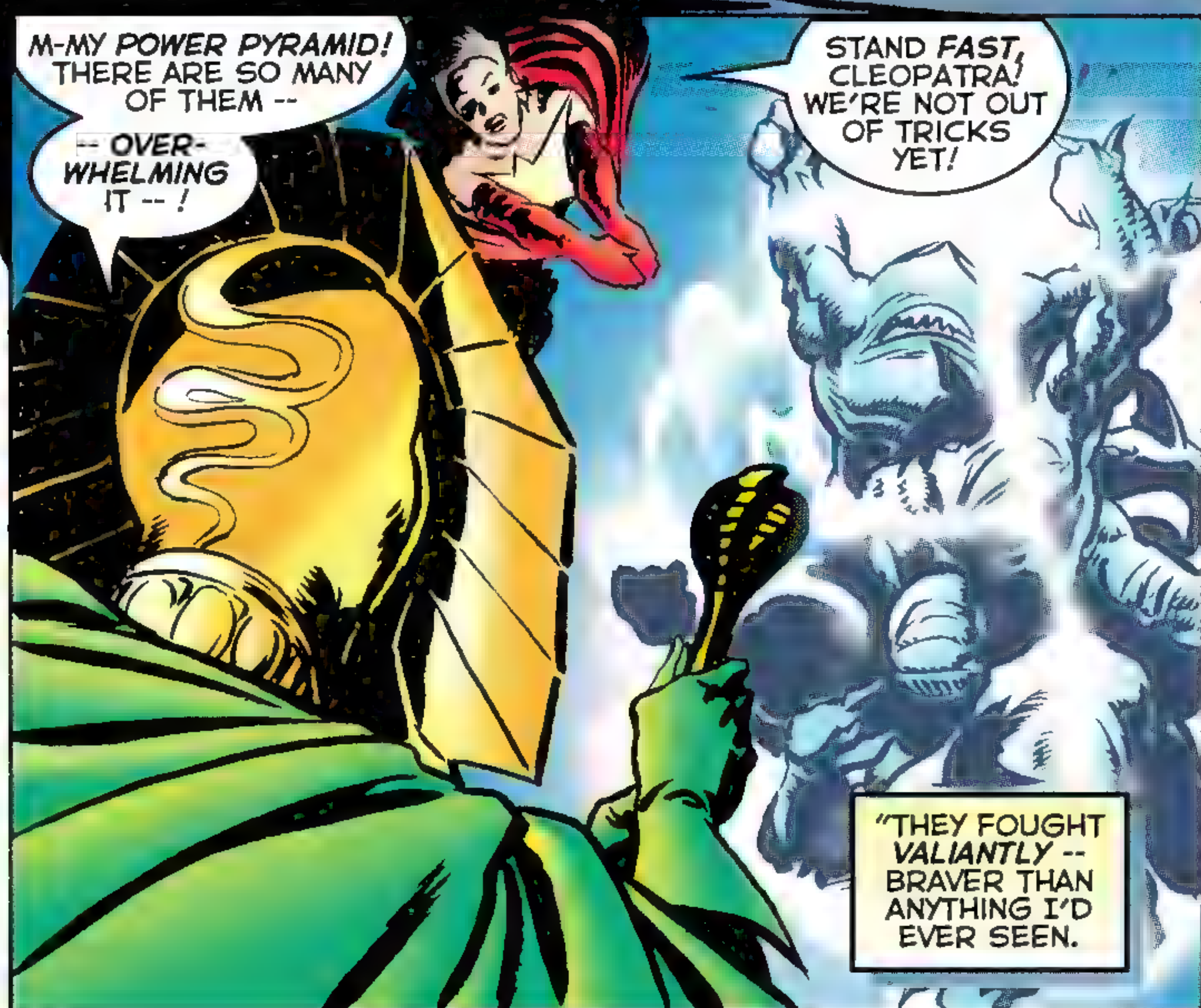
-- OVER-WHELMING IT -- !

STAND FAST, CLEOPATRA! WE'RE NOT OUT OF TRICKS YET!

"THEY FOUGHT VALIANTLY -- BRAVER THAN ANYTHING I'D EVER SEEN."

"BUT THE OUTCOME WAS INEVITABLE. THERE WERE TOO MANY SHARK-MEN --

"-- AND HONOR GUARD WAS GOING TO LOSE."



FEAR NOT,
OBSERVER.
THIS BATTLE IS
FAR FROM
OVER.

H-HUH?

"I COULD HAVE SWORN IT
WAS SOLID ROCK BEHIND ME.

"BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN HE WAS *THERE*.
MOVING PAST ME, STRIDING TOWARD
THE BATTLE CALMLY, UNHURRIEDLY.

"BUT ONE LOOK AT
THAT *LINED, WEATHERED*
FACE, AND I KNEW
WHO IT WAS."

THE OLD
SOLDIER.

"NO ONE HAD SEEN HIM
SINCE 1944. BUT HE'D
BEEN THOUGHT DEAD
BEFORE -- IN 1918, IN
1898, IN 1863.

"I'D NEVER SEEN HIM
MYSELF, OF COURSE.
THERE'S NO FILM
FOOTAGE OF HIM,
NO PHOTOGRAPHS.

"WHATEVER I'D THOUGHT --
WHATEVER I'D *FEARED* -- IF
IT WAS BAD ENOUGH TO
REQUIRE HIS PRESENCE --"

AGENT!

"-- IT WAS WORSE
THAN I COULD
POSSIBLY IMAGINE."

WE ARE IN
A *HALF-WORLD*
BETWEEN REALITIES --
AND WE MUST PREVENT
IT FROM BECOMING A
BEACHHEAD!

KNOW
YOU
THIS --



-- THE ALTAR IS THE KEYSTONE THAT HOLDS THIS PLACE TOGETHER.

REALLY? GOOD TO KNOW THAT, SOLDIER -- AND GOOD TO KNOW YOU'RE STILL PART OF THE FIGHT.

MAX!



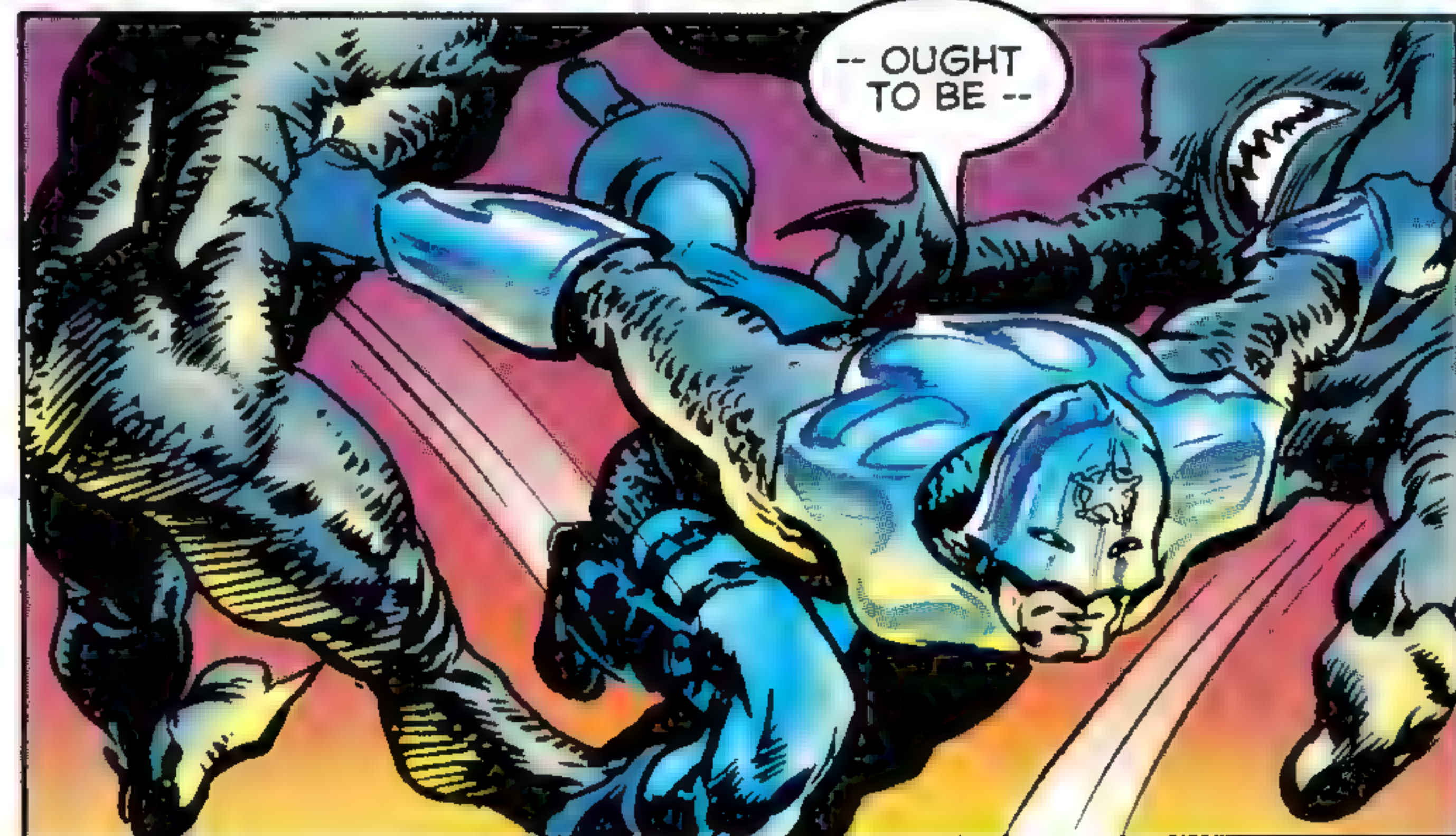
I COULD USE SOME ROOM TO MOVE!

ALL YOU WANT, S.A.! ANYTHING ELSE I CAN HELP YOU WITH, JUST ASK!



THANKS, MAX --

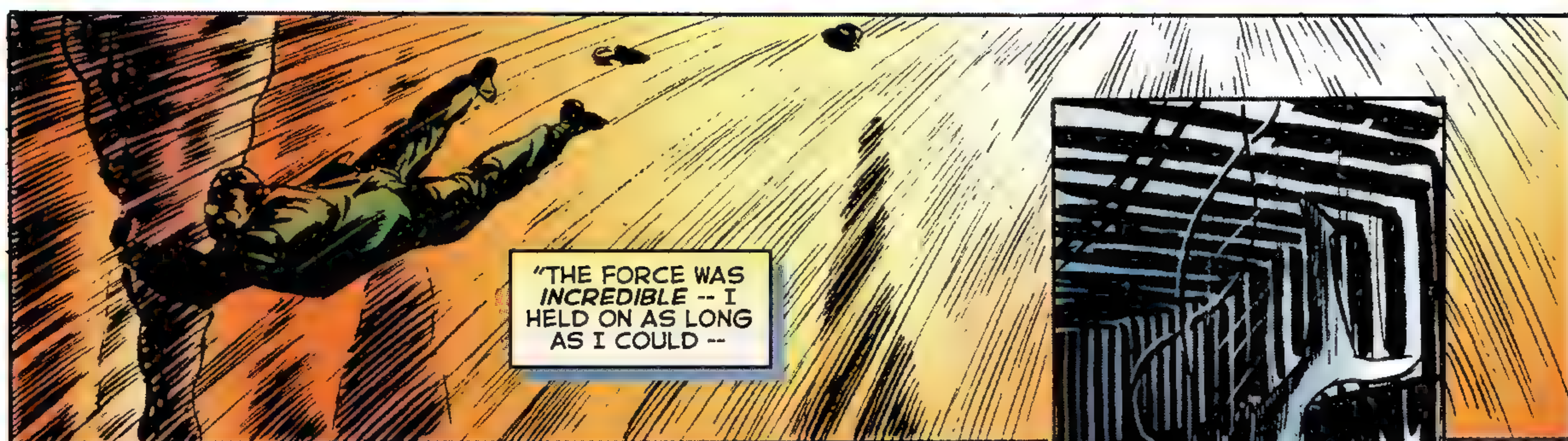
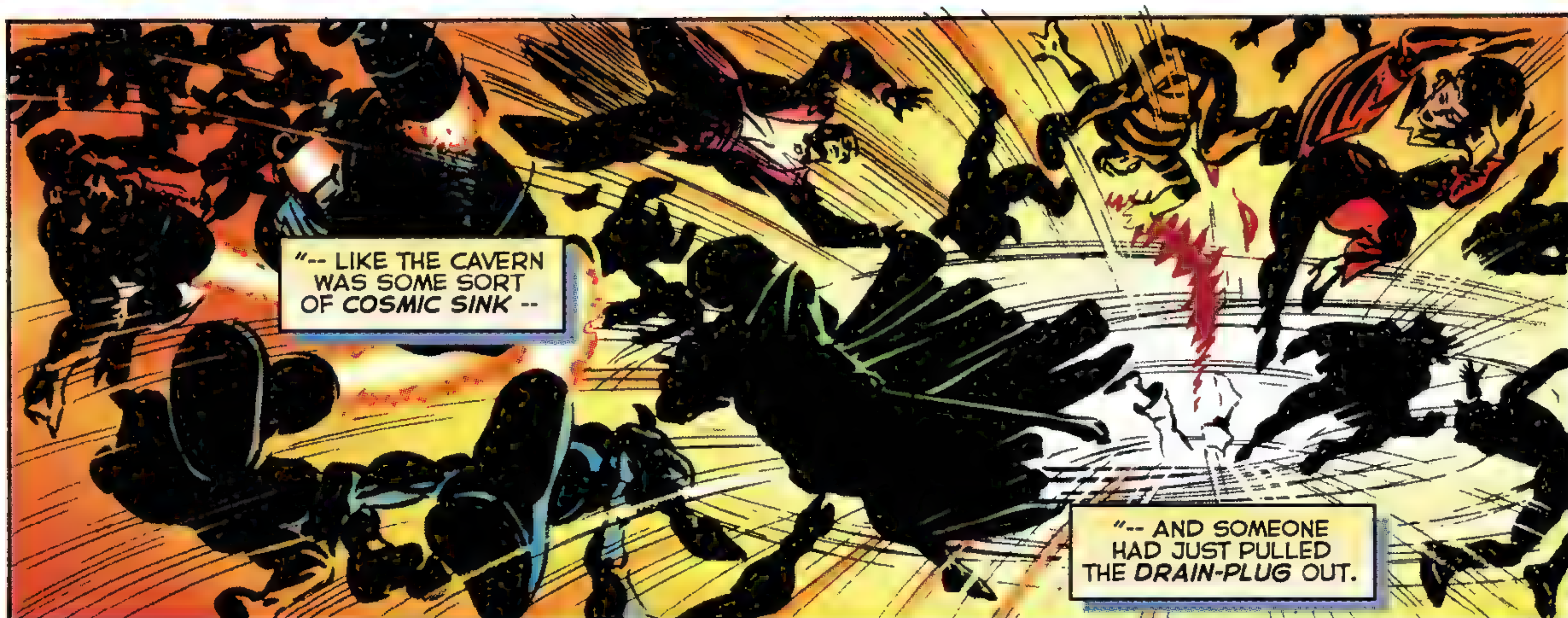
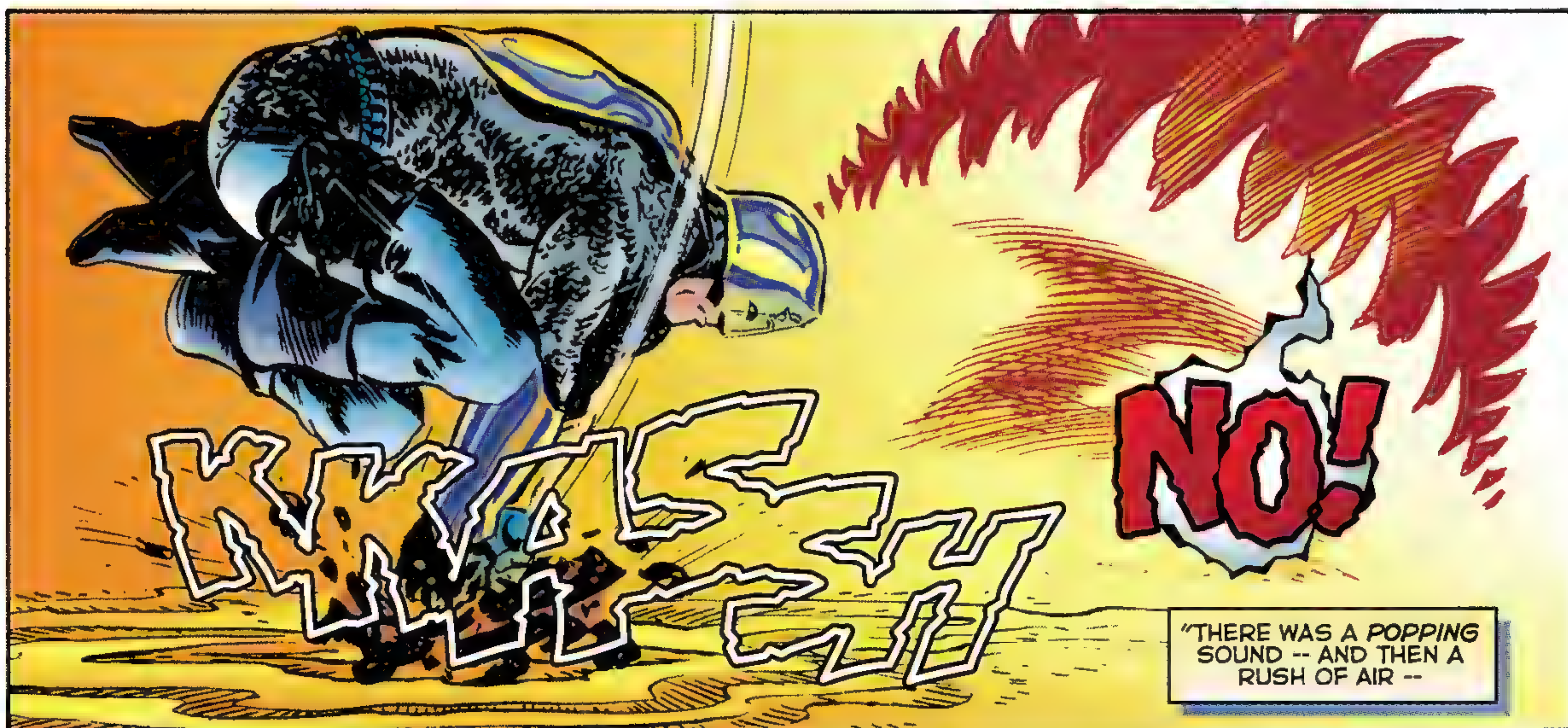
-- BUT THIS --



-- OUGHT TO BE --

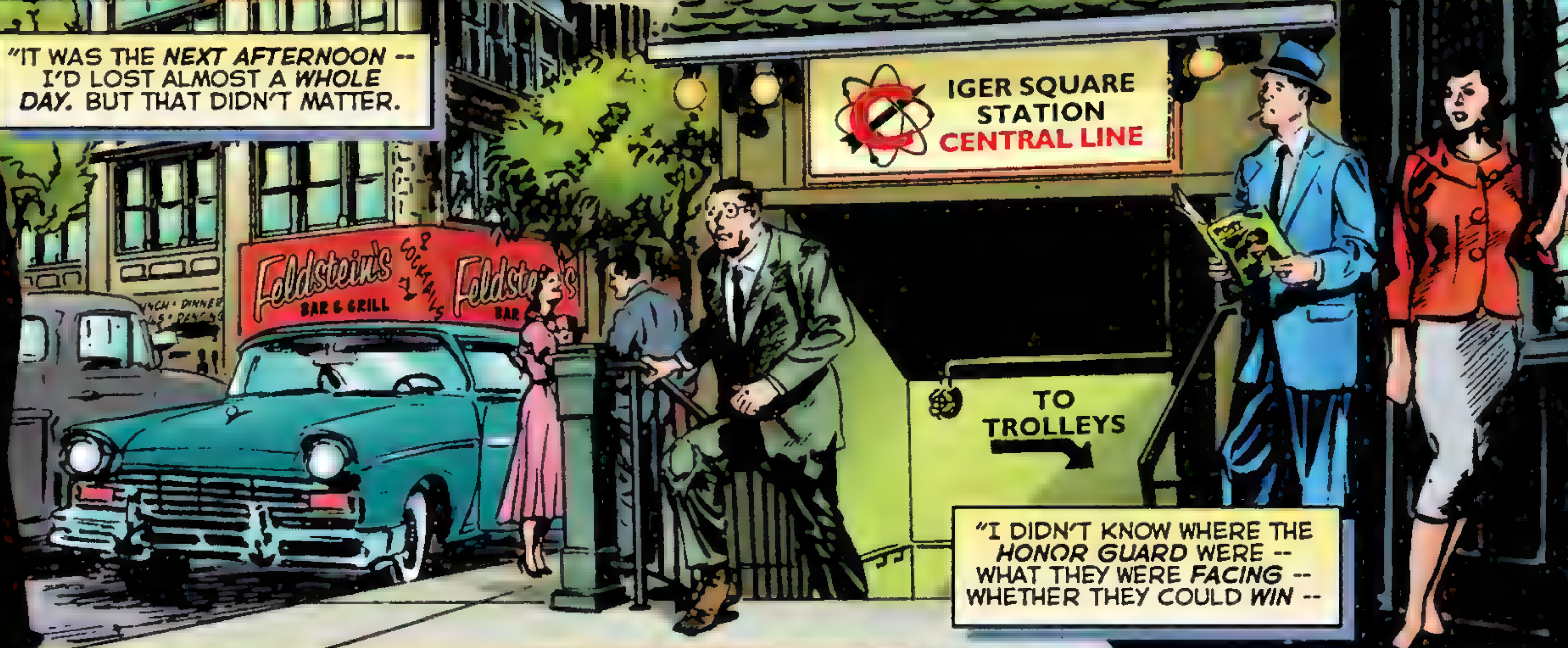


-- ALL I NEED!

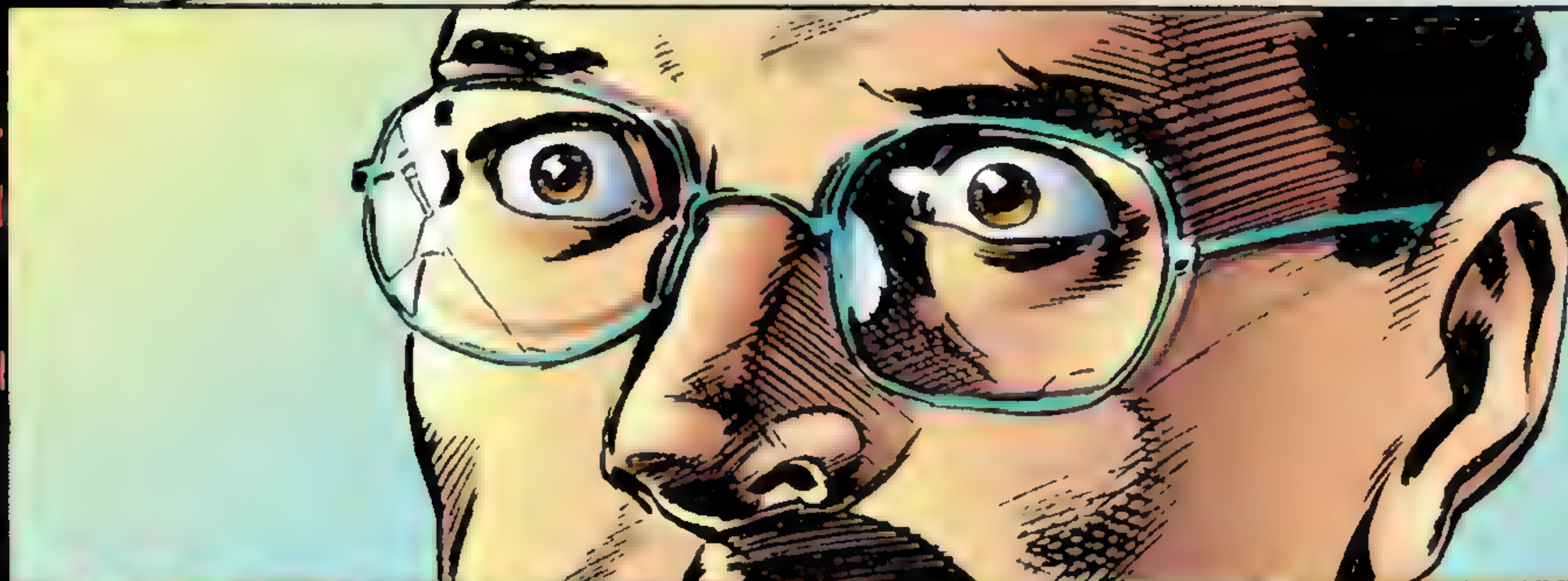




"IT WAS THE NEXT AFTERNOON --
I'D LOST ALMOST A WHOLE
DAY. BUT THAT DIDN'T MATTER.



"I DIDN'T KNOW WHERE THE
HONOR GUARD WERE --
WHAT THEY WERE FACING --
WHETHER THEY COULD WIN --



"-- BUT I HAD
A STORY, AND I
HAD TO TELL IT.

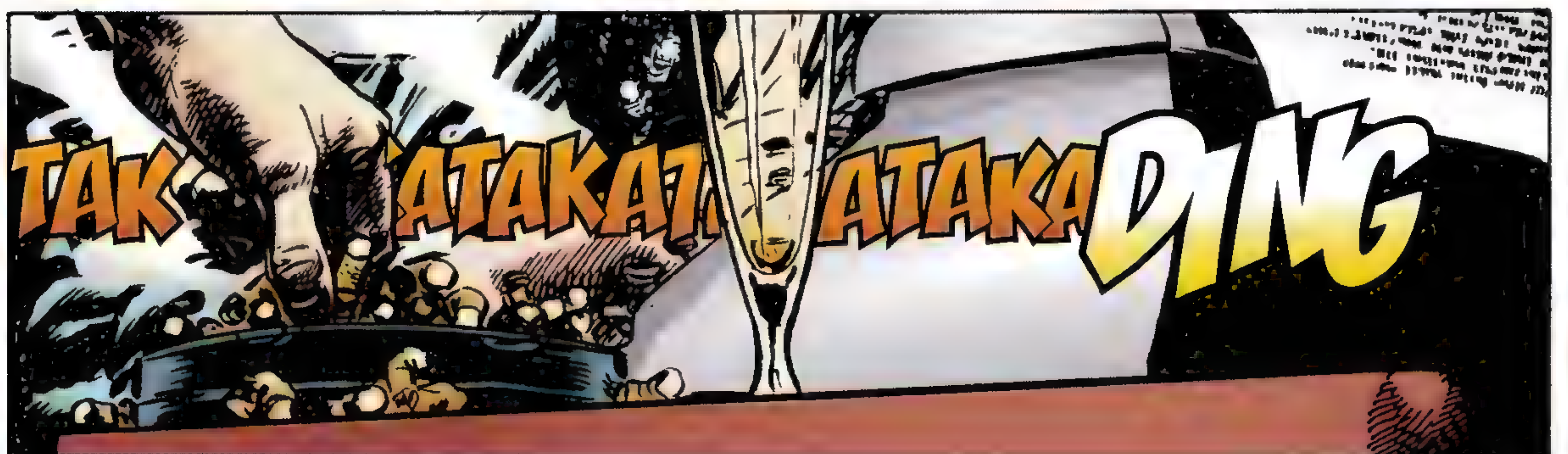
"I HAD A
STORY."



ELLIOT!

HOLY
COW, WHAT
HAPPENED
TO YOU?

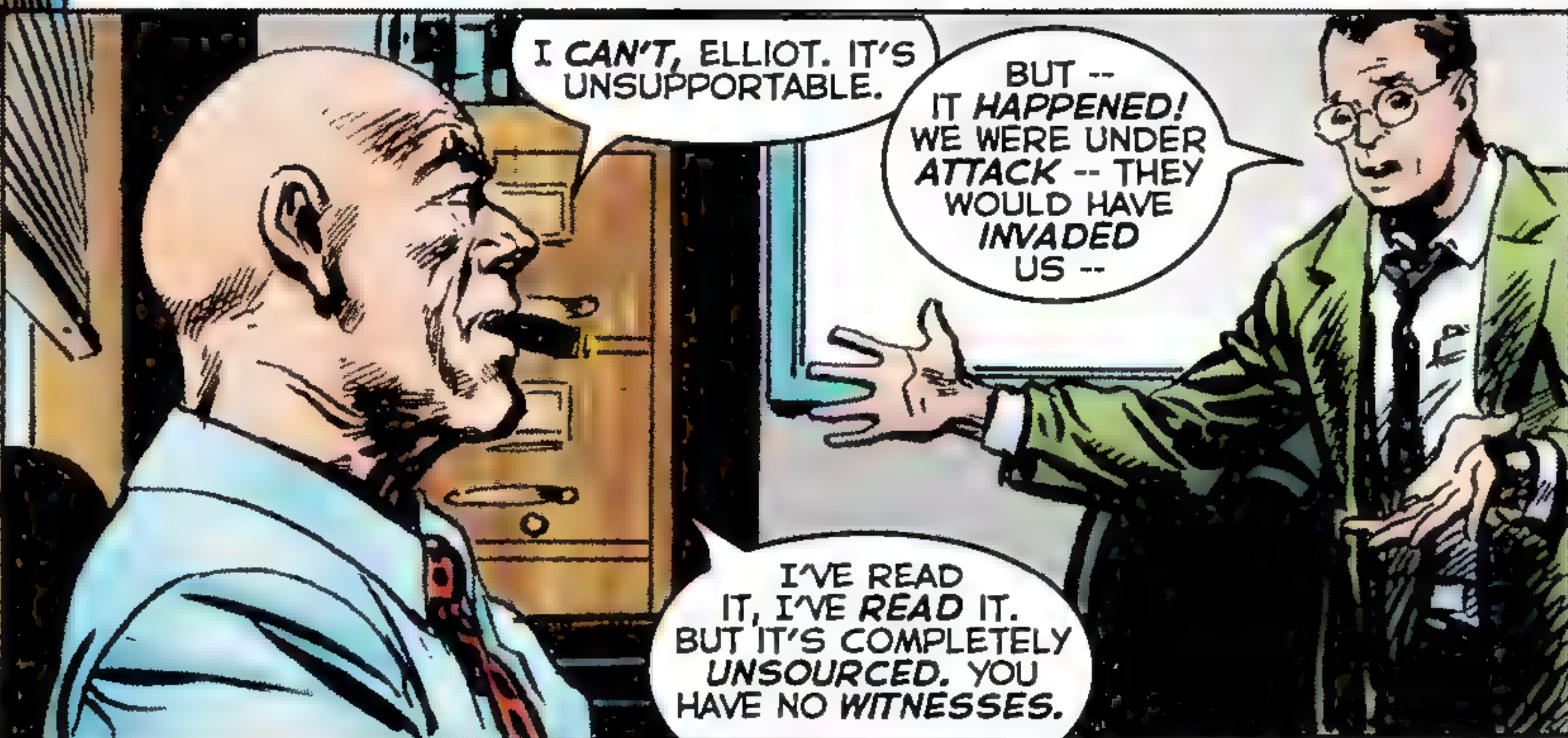
I NEED A
TYPEWRITER.





WHAT?!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU'RE NOT RUNNING IT?



I CAN'T, ELLIOT. IT'S UNSUPPORTABLE.

BUT -- IT HAPPENED! WE WERE UNDER ATTACK -- THEY WOULD HAVE INVADED US --

I'VE READ IT, I'VE READ IT. BUT IT'S COMPLETELY UNSOURCED. YOU HAVE NO WITNESSES.



I WAS THERE! I SAW IT ALL!

THE AGENT, THE SHARK-MEN, THE OLD SOLDIER -- HE WAS CLOSE ENOUGH FOR ME TO TOUCH!

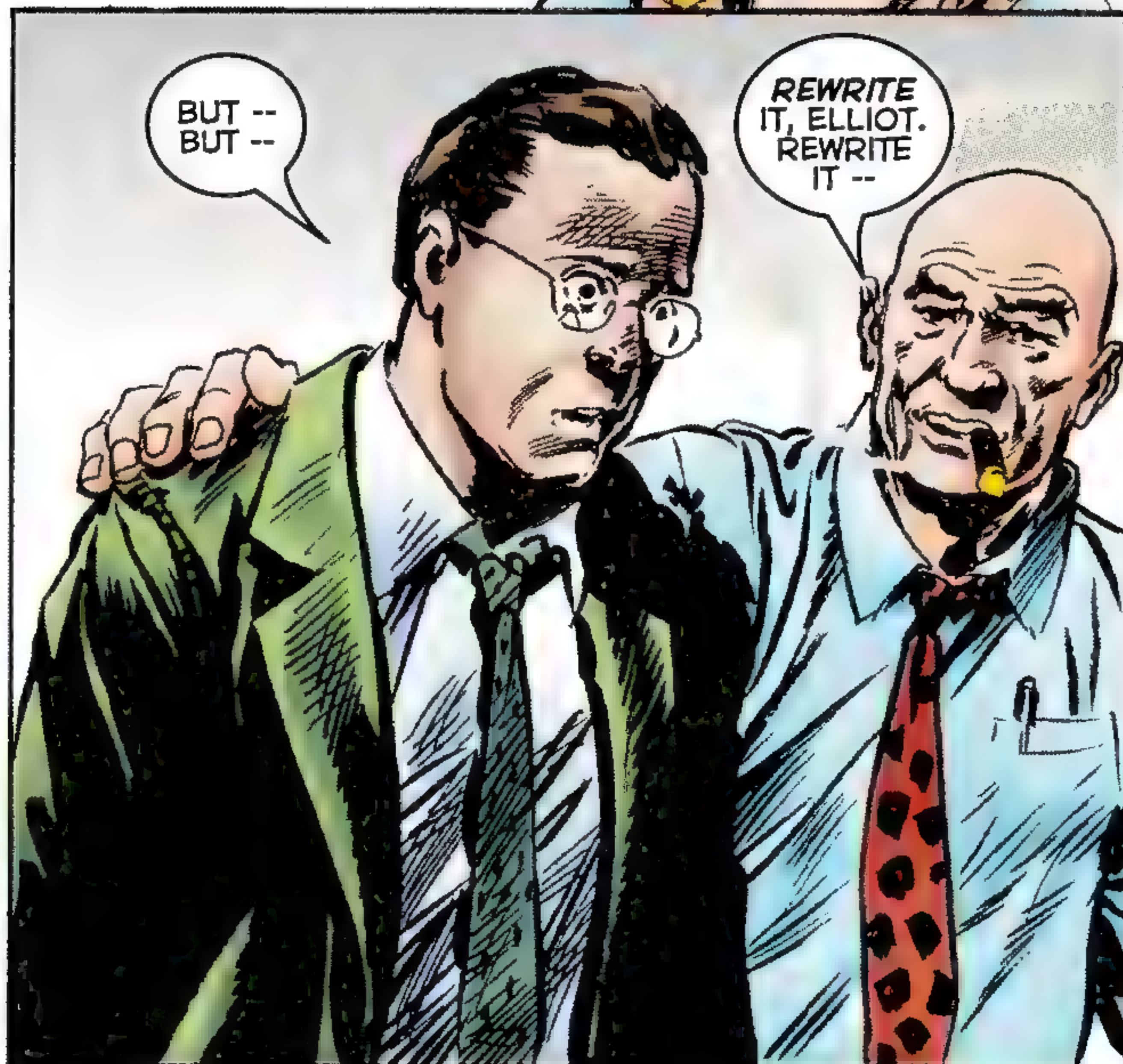
I WAS THERE!

NO OFFENSE, ELLIOT. BUT A NEOPHYTE REPORTER, HIS FIRST WEEK ON THE JOB, BRINGING IN A WILD STORY LIKE THIS --



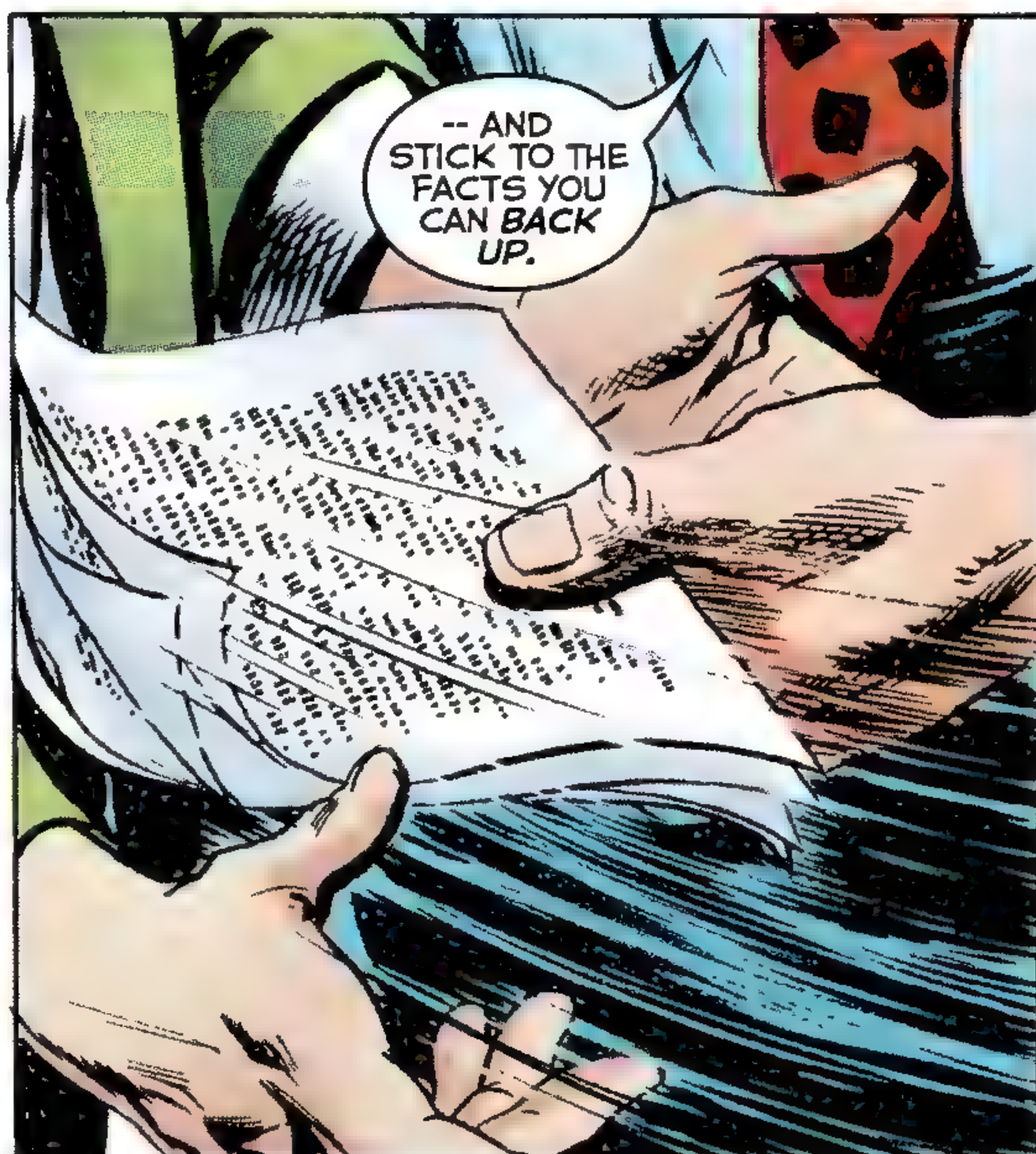
-- EXTRA-DIMENSIONAL ATTACK, MYSTIC HALF-WORLDS, THE OLD SOLDIER...

...WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT, IN MY SHOES?



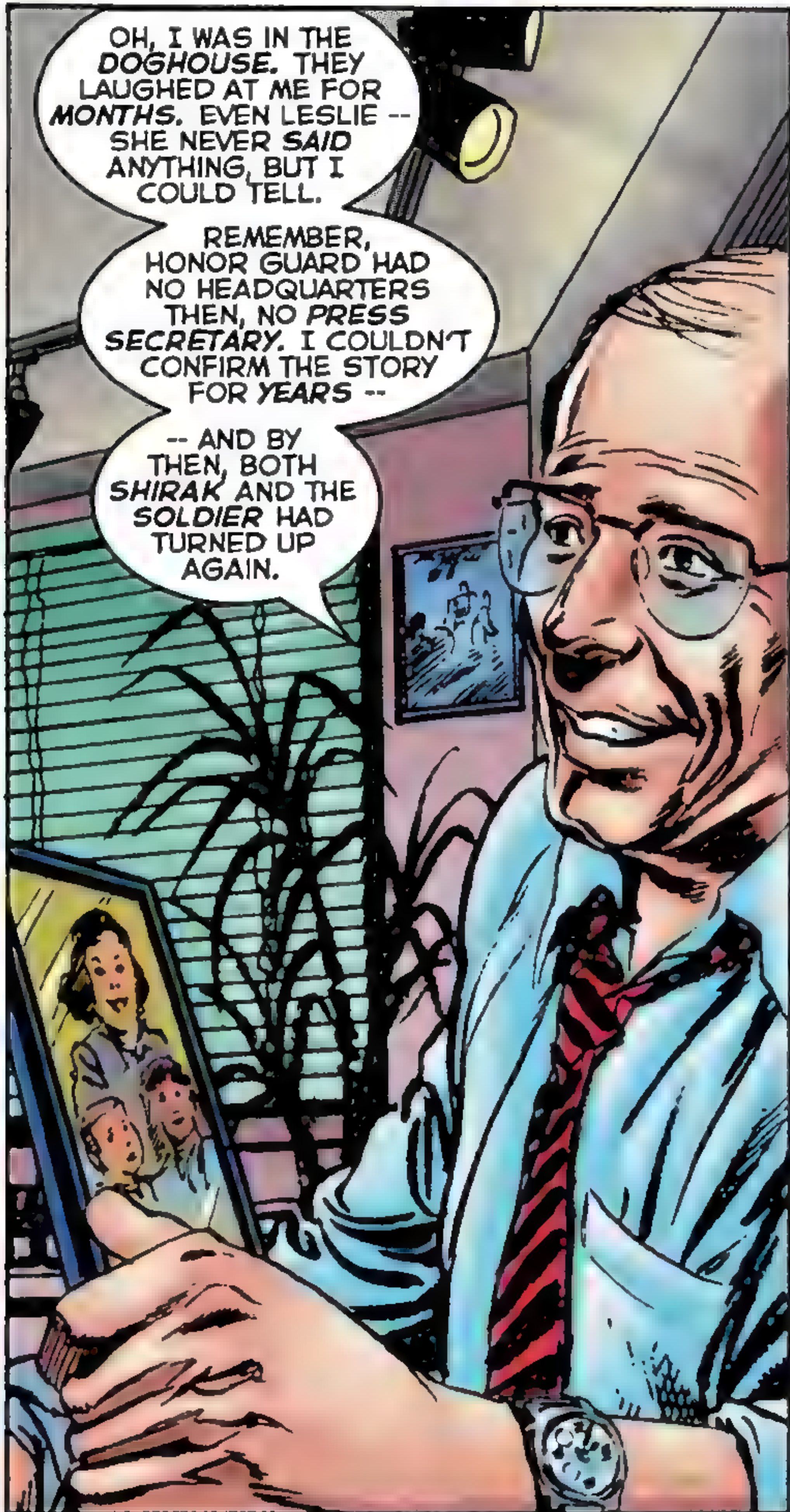
BUT -- BUT --

REWRITE IT, ELLIOT. REWRITE IT --



-- AND STICK TO THE FACTS YOU CAN BACK UP.





OH, I WAS IN THE DOGHOUSE. THEY LAUGHED AT ME FOR MONTHS. EVEN LESLIE -- SHE NEVER SAID ANYTHING, BUT I COULD TELL.

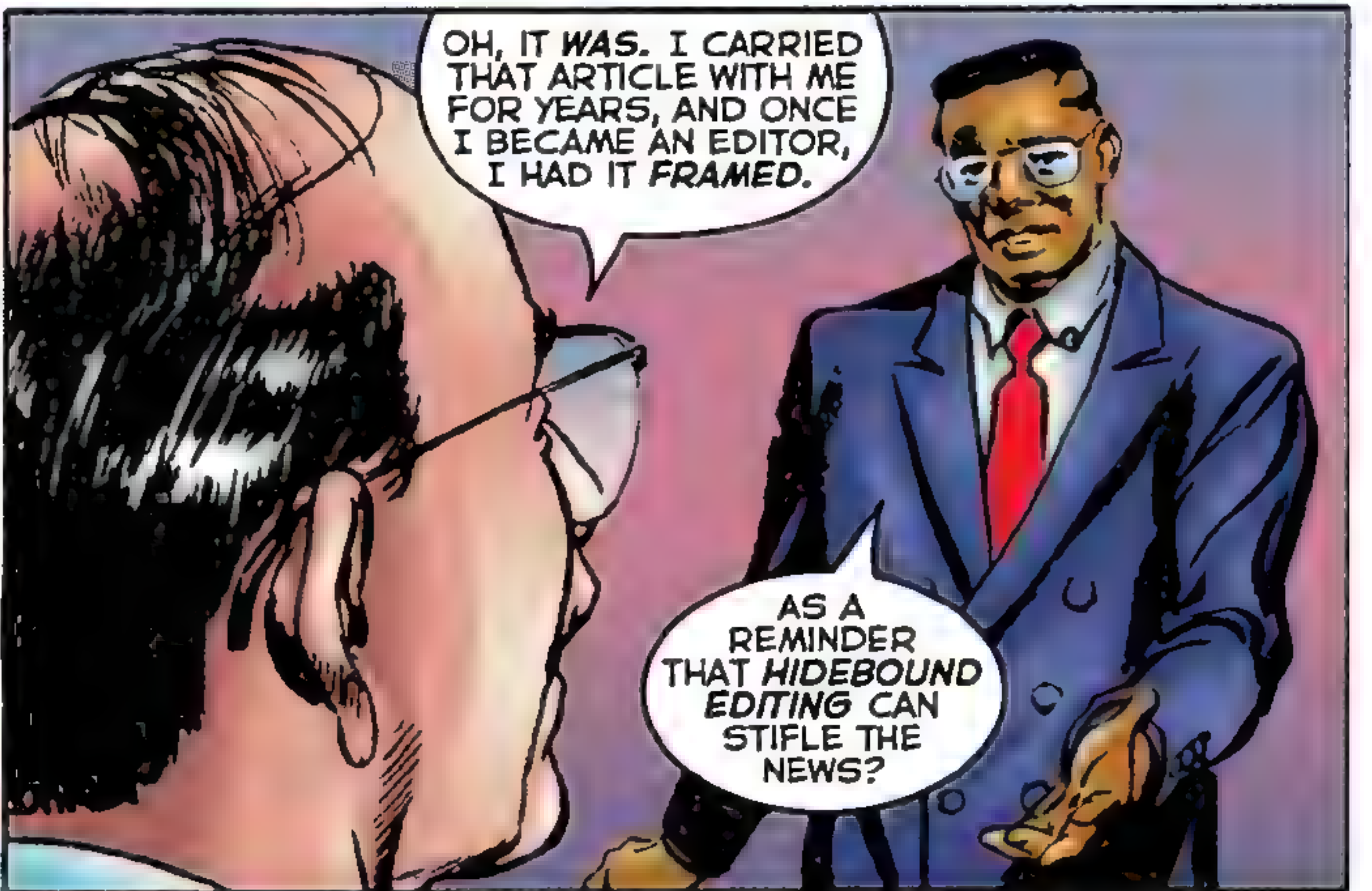
REMEMBER, HONOR GUARD HAD NO HEADQUARTERS THEN, NO PRESS SECRETARY. I COULDN'T CONFIRM THE STORY FOR YEARS --

-- AND BY THEN, BOTH SHIRAK AND THE SOLDIER HAD TURNED UP AGAIN.



WOW -- THE DEVOURER FIVE YEARS EARLY. THE OLD SOLDIER RETURNING BEFORE THE FALL OF SAIGON.

IT MUST HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLY FRUSTRATING FOR YOU.



OH, IT WAS. I CARRIED THAT ARTICLE WITH ME FOR YEARS, AND ONCE I BECAME AN EDITOR, I HAD IT FRAMED.

AS A REMINDER THAT HIDEBOUND EDITING CAN STIFLE THE NEWS?



NO, THOUGH THAT'S WHAT MOST PEOPLE THINK WHEN THEY HEAR THE STORY.

NO -- I SAVED THE ARTICLE BECAUSE HE WAS RIGHT.

NOW, C'MON -- TIME FOR LUNCH. I'M STARVED, HOW ABOUT YOU?



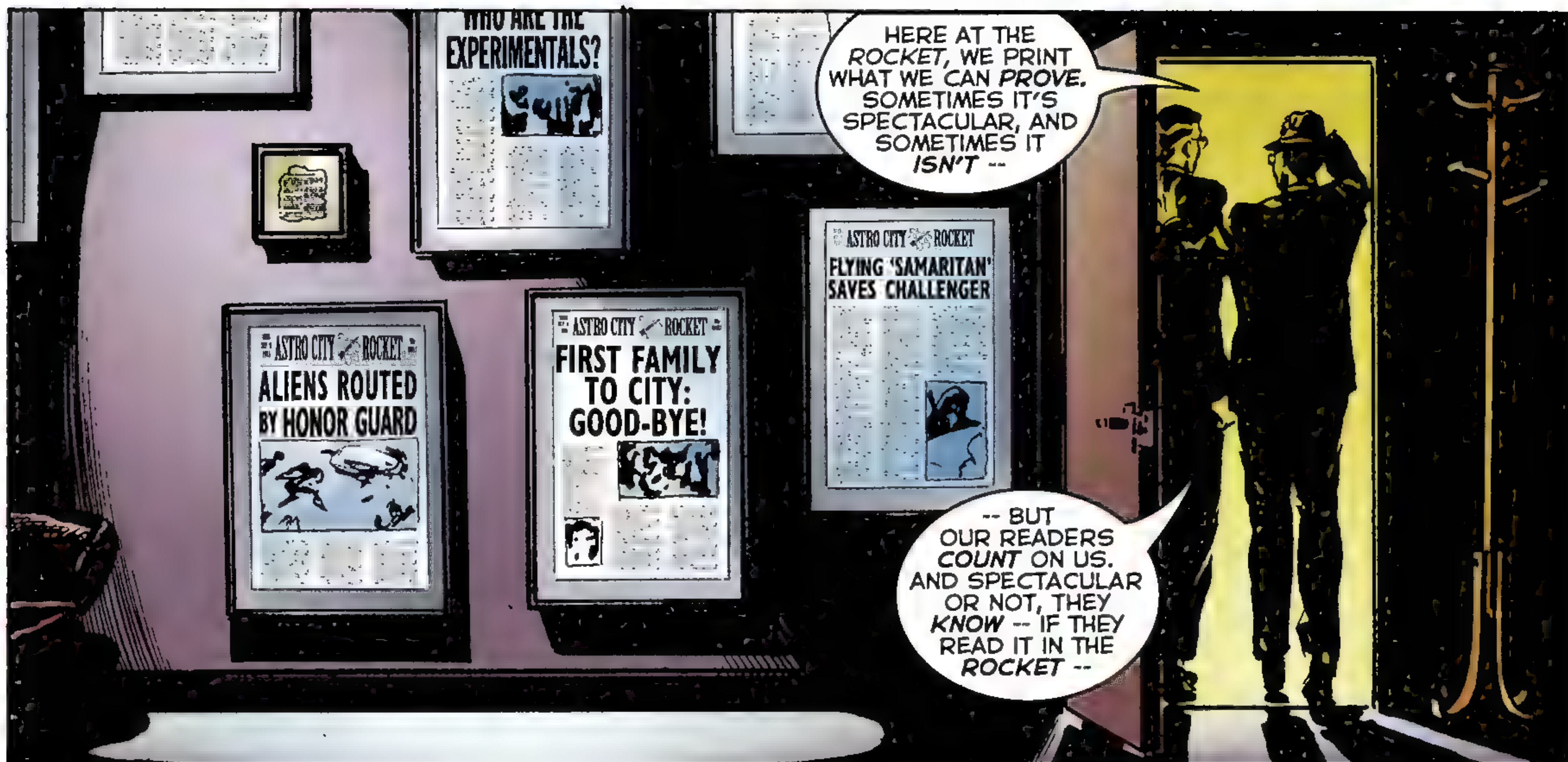
BUT -- WHAT YOU SAW --

THIS IS A STRANGE WORLD, SON, AND THERE ARE LOTS OF WEIRD THINGS IN IT. THAT MAKES US, AS A NEWSPAPER, VULNERABLE.



OTHER NEWSPAPERS MAY GO OUT THERE WITH SENSATIONAL STORIES, SCREAMING HEADLINES THAT TURN OUT TO BE A MISTAKE --

-- AND THEY END UP LOOKING LIKE MONKEYS. NOT US.



Trolley delayed by shark

An ACTA trolley was delayed this afternoon when it struck a six-foot frozen shark that had apparently fallen onto the track in the vicinity of Iger Square, according to ACTA and police officials.

The shark had apparently been hung by a rope from electrical piping above the trolley tracks. The rope broke and the shark fell onto the tracks below, an ACTA official theorized.

The trolley was heading toward Museum Row on the ACTA's Central Line when

it encountered the shark between Celardo and Elias streets about 2:40 p.m., officials said.

The shark had become wedged between the wheels of the trolley, but caused neither derailment nor injuries. The accident did, however, cause "minimal" delay in service, said an ACTA official.

Origin of the frozen and gutted shark was not immediately known. No sharks had been reported missing, according to a spokesman for the Astro City Aquarium.

-- IT'S THE TRUTH.

YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY



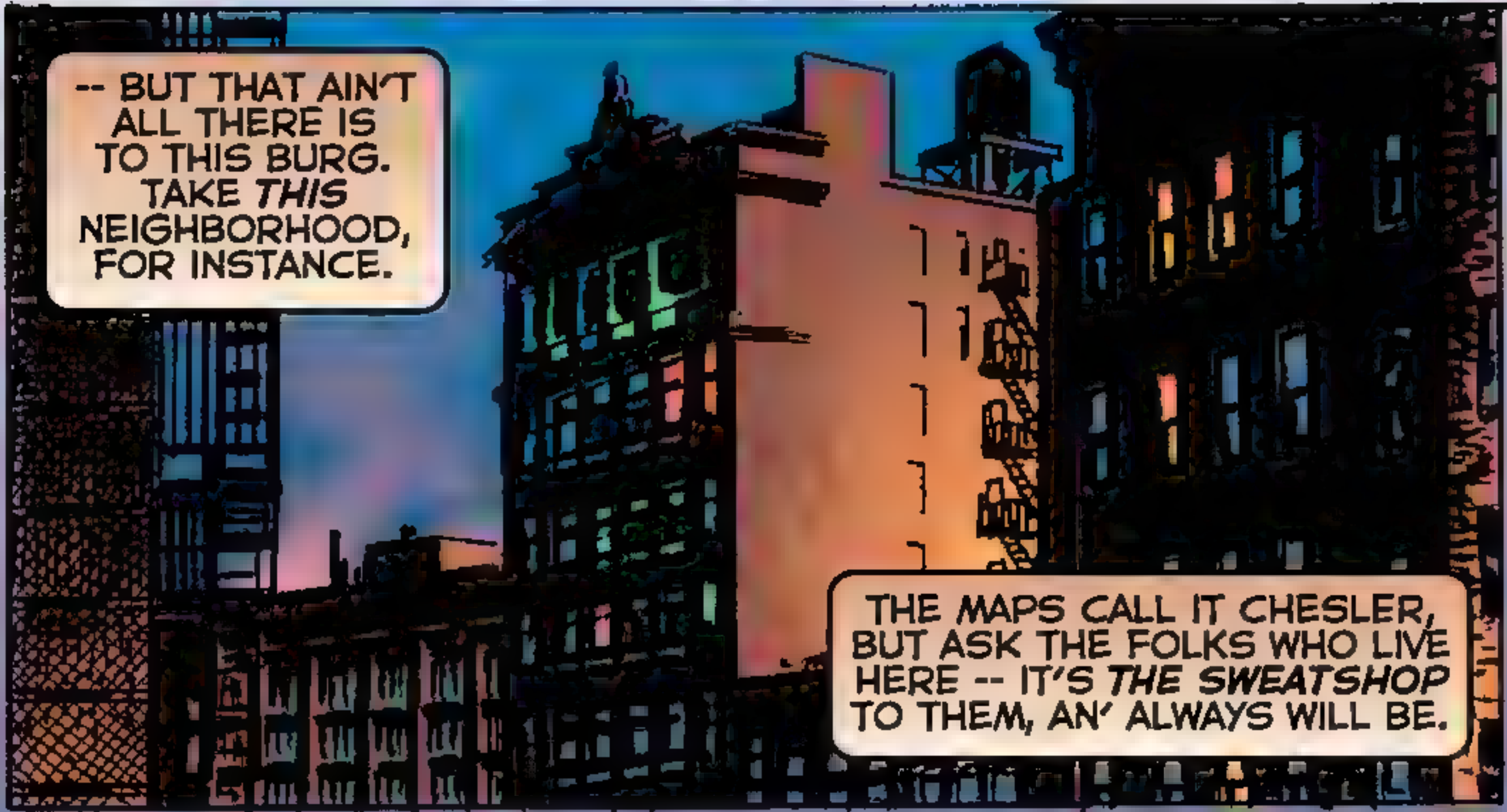




THIS IS THE GREATEST CITY IN THE WORLD.

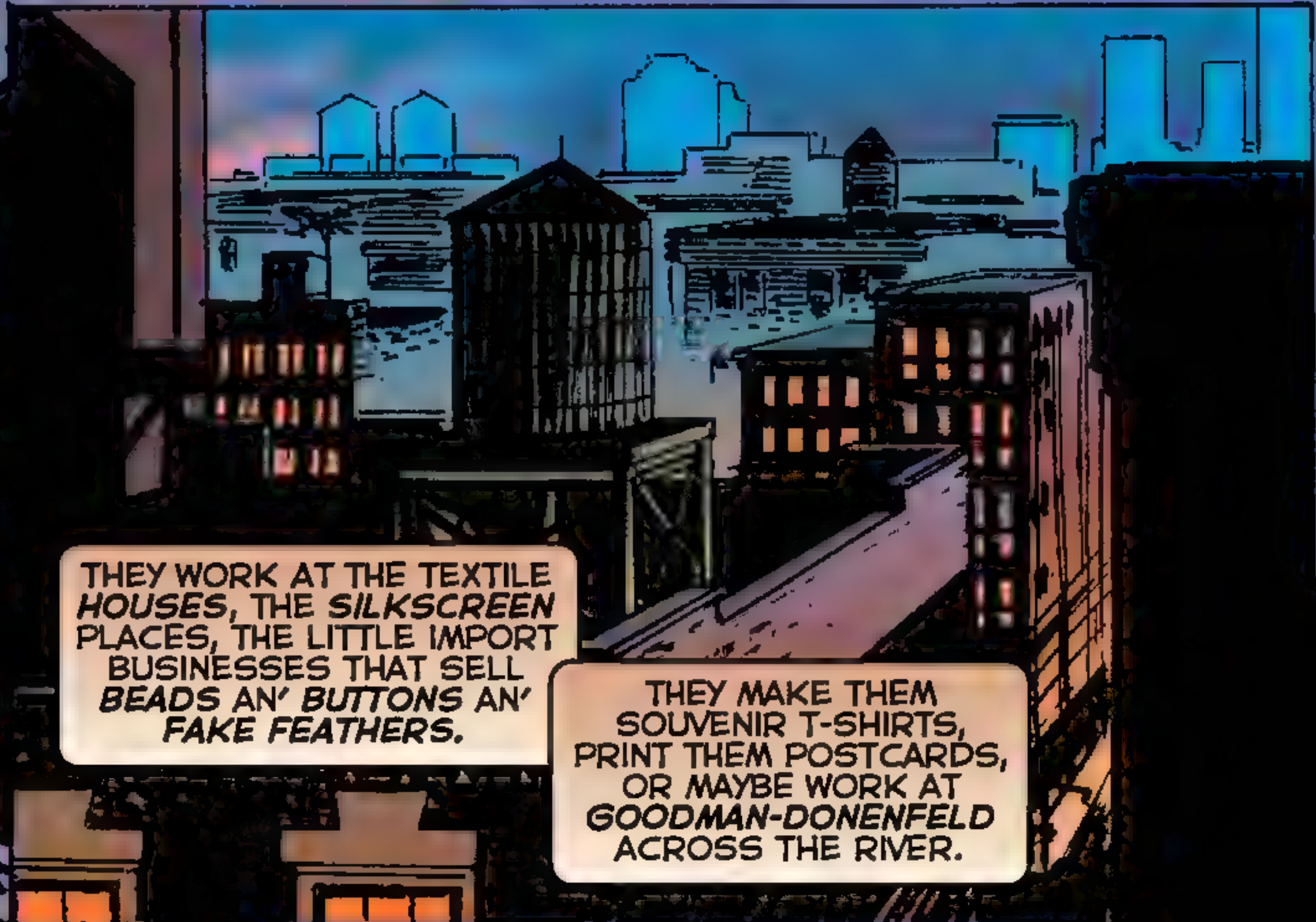
I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN THAT.

YOU GOT YOUR SKYSCRAPERS AN' CHURCHES AN' SUPER-CAPIES, ALL THE STUFF IN THE POSTCARDS AN' BROCHURES, AN' YEAH, FINE --



-- BUT THAT AIN'T ALL THERE IS TO THIS BURG. TAKE THIS NEIGHBORHOOD, FOR INSTANCE.

THE MAPS CALL IT CHESLER, BUT ASK THE FOLKS WHO LIVE HERE -- IT'S THE SWEATSHOP TO THEM, AN' ALWAYS WILL BE.



THEY WORK AT THE TEXTILE HOUSES, THE SILKSCREEN PLACES, THE LITTLE IMPORT BUSINESSES THAT SELL BEADS AN' BUTTONS AN' FAKE FEATHERS.

THEY MAKE THEM SOUVENIR T-SHIRTS, PRINT THEM POSTCARDS, OR MAYBE WORK AT GOODMAN-DONENFELD ACROSS THE RIVER.



OR MAYBE, IF A FELLA'S TIRED OF BACK BREAKIN' LABOR FOR SLAVE WAGES, HE'LL DO A LITTLE EXTRA-CURRICULAR WORK --

HUFF HUFF HUFF

-- GRAB HIMSELF SOME OF THAT MONEY THAT'S FLOATIN' AROUND.



A LOT OF MONEY -- LEGAL AN' ILLEGAL -- MOVES THROUGH THE SHOP. AN' A SHARP-EYED FELLA --

HUFF HUFF

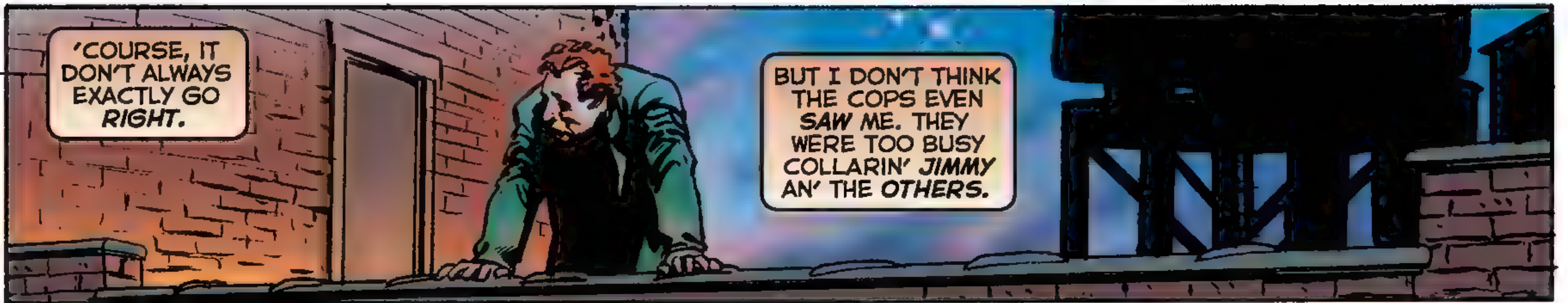


-- A FELLA WHO KEEPS HIS EYES OPEN --

HUFF

-- HE MIGHT SEE A THING OR TWO COULD HELP HIM OUT.





'COURSE, IT
DON'T ALWAYS
EXACTLY GO
RIGHT.

BUT I DON'T THINK
THE COPS EVEN
SAW ME. THEY
WERE TOO BUSY
COLLARIN' JIMMY
AN' THE OTHERS.



AWRIGHT, AWRIGHT, SO I SCREWED
UP. I WAS THE LOOKOUT, AND I
SHOULDA BEEN LOOKIN' OUT BETTER.

BUT IT
AIN'T ALL
MY FAULT.



IF THEY HADN'T MISSED A
SILENT ALARM OR SOMETHIN',
THERE WOULDN'T'VE BEEN
COPS TO GET PAST ME!

AN' THAT
AIN'T THE
STORY
ANYWAYS.



ONE FOULED-UP
WAREHOUSE
HEIST AIN'T
NOTHIN' SPECIAL.
IT'S WHAT
HAPPENS AFTER.

I'D RUN ALL THE
WAY TO THE EDGE
OF THE SHOP --

-- WHERE THE WAREHOUSES
AN' BODEGAS SMACK INTO
RESTORED BROWNSTONES
AN' FERN BARS.



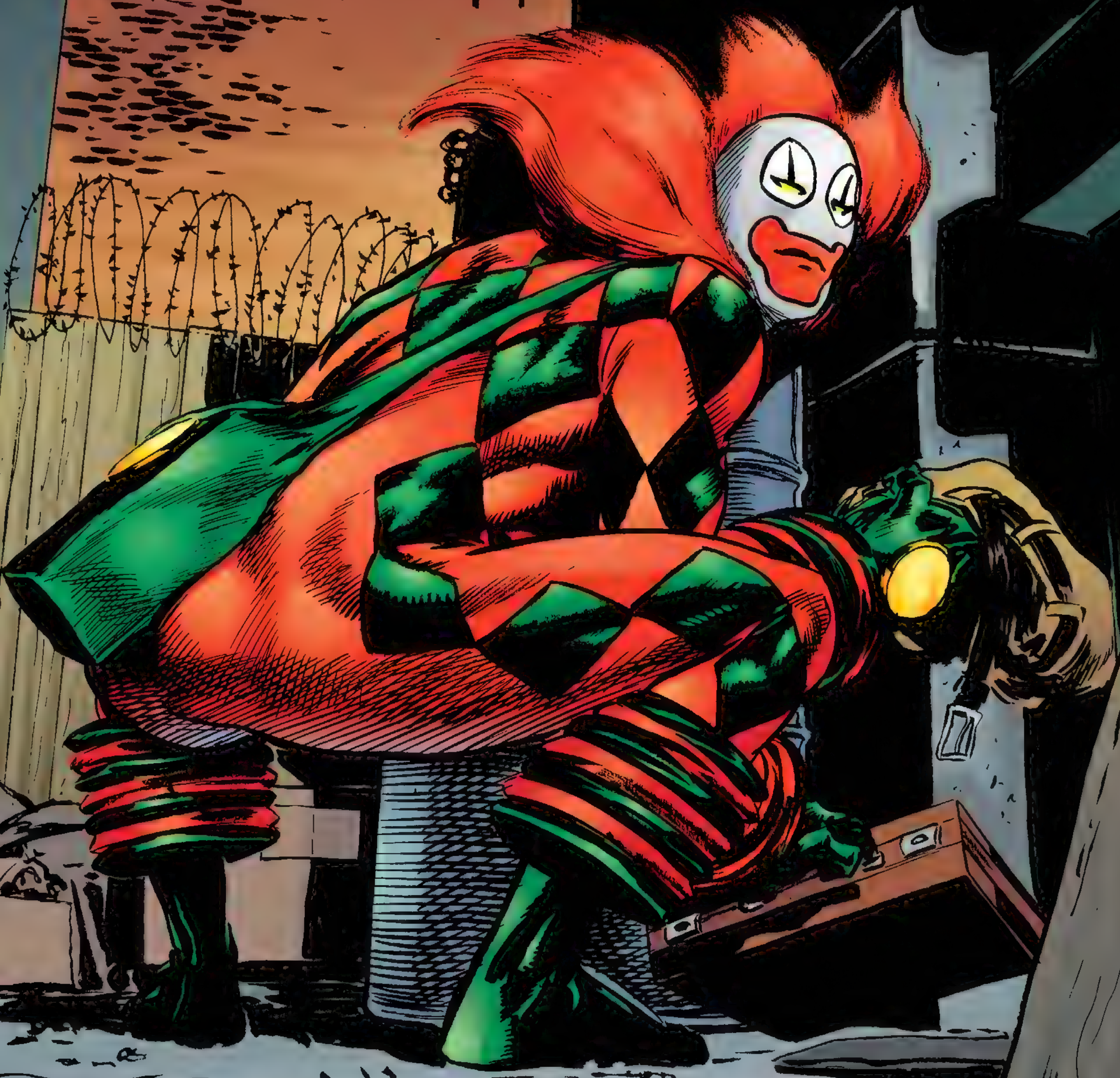
NOT MUCH TO SEE HERE
MOST NIGHTS. JUST A
BUNCHA YUPPIES AFRAID
OF THE DARK.

BUT LIKE
I SAY --

-- A FELLA
KEEPS HIS
EYES OPEN IN
THIS TOWN --

A Little KNOWLEDGE

-- HE'LL SEE
PLENTY.







HE DIDN'T
SEE ME HE
DIDN'T SEE ME
HE DIDN'T SEE
ME HE DIDN'T
SEE ME --



HE DIDN'T
SEE ME.

IT'S DARK. THERE'S
A BIGGER BUILDIN'
BEHIND ME. I
WASN'T SILHOUETTED
AGAINST NOTHIN' --

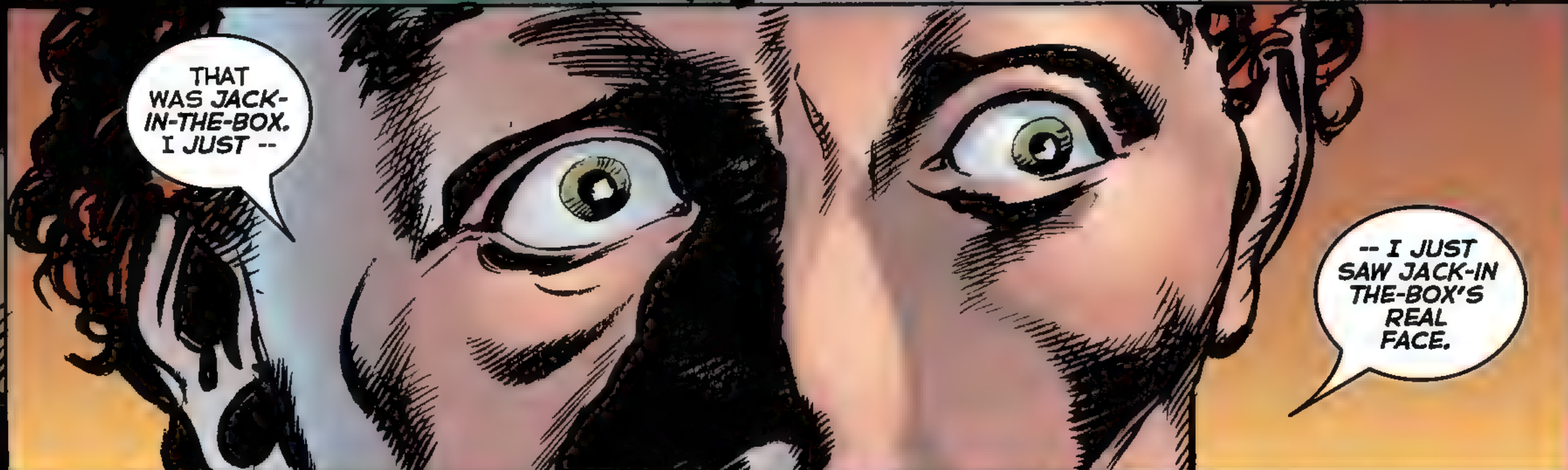


-- AN' I'M THINKIN'
HOW HE LOOKS
PRETTY YOUNG FOR
A GUY'S GOTTA BE
AS OLD AS HE IS --

-- YOUNGER'N
ME, EVEN --



-- WHEN
IT REALLY
SINKS IN.



THAT
WAS JACK-
IN-THE-BOX.
I JUST --

-- I JUST
SAW JACK-IN
THE-BOX'S
REAL
FACE.

JACK-IN-THE-BOX.

HE'S BEEN AROUND FOR LIKE THIRTY YEARS, AND NOBODY'S TUMBLED TO HIS SECRETS BEFORE.

NOT THE DEACON, NOT THE BRASS MONKEY, NOT THE HUMAN WEASEL --

-- HECK, THE COPS HAVE BEEN AFTER HIM A TIME OR TWO, BUT THEY NEVER CAUGHT HIM, AND HE ALWAYS CLEARED HIS NAME.

-- THEY KNOW WHAT IT'S LIKE TO GET CONFETTED -- OR TO BE ZAPPED STUPID BY ONE A' THOSE FREAKY RUBBER NOSES A' HIS.



BUT NOBODY EVER GOT A LOOK AT HIS FACE.

NBODY BUT ME, THAT IS.

THAT'S THE TRICK, AIN'T IT?

YOU GOTTA KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN --

-- YOU GOTTA LOOK FOR YOUR OPPORTUNITIES --

-- BUT STILL --

-- THIS IS A GREAT TOWN.



ASTRO CITY ROCKET
'BIZARRE CLOWN SAVES HOSTAGES'
DR. FURS BATTLES 'SPACE SPIDERS'

ASTRO CITY ROCKET
JACK-IN-THE-BOX
POSES WHATEVER
CORRUPTION

ASTRO CITY ROCKET
MOB WAR BECOMES
SURPRISE PARTY

ASTRO CITY ROCKET
JACK-IN-THE-BOX TRAPPED
IN FIERY EXPLOSION

ASTRO CITY ROCKET
JACK'S BACK
MIA HERO RETURNS
VEIDT ST. SHOOT



I CAN SEE
IT NOW.

NO MORE
SWEATSHOP
FOR ME --



GOOD
EVENING,
MISTER
EISENSTEIN.

AND
HOW ARE YOU
TONIGHT, MISTER
EISENSTEIN?

WELCOME
TO THE CAIRO
CLUB, MISTER
EISENSTEIN.



MORE
CHAMPAGNE,
MISTER
EISENSTEIN?

PLEASE.
AND A DRINK FOR
EVERYONE IN THIS
ESTABLISHMENT,
MY DEAR. TAKE IT
OUT OF THIS.

AND DEAR?
A BOTTLE OF
YOUR BEST TO THE
DEACON --



-- WITH THE
COMPLIMENTS OF
MISTER ANDREW
EISENSTEIN.

IT'S
INCREDIBLE!
EISENSTEIN'S A
HIGH ROLLER --
OVERNIGHT!

WORTH
A COOL
MIL -- AND HE
SAYS ANYONE
COULDA DONE
IT --



" -- IF THEY'D
JUST KEPT THEIR
EYES OPEN."

'COURSE, I DON'T
KNOW THE GUY'S
NAME. BUT THAT'S
NO PROBLEM.

SHARP-EYED
GUY LIKE ME
SEES A LOTTA
PEOPLE --

-- AND MAKES IT A
POINT TO REMEMBER
WHAT HE'S SEEN.



CRAIG AVENUE BAR & GRILL

CRAIG AVENUE BAR & GRILL

THURSDAY NIGHT, EVERETT PIER. A BILL A MAN.

THAT'S A TWO-BILL JOB -- !

JUST LIFTIN' AN' LOADIN', EYES. ONE BILL, TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT.

THE CRAIG AVENUE AIN'T IN THEM TOURIST GUIDES EITHER -- IT'S STRICTLY A NEIGHBORHOOD PLACE. A GOOD PLACE TO TALK --

YEAH, YEAH. TELL 'EM I'M IN, JOHNNY.

THE CONFESSOR

CAUGHT GLEASON UPTOWN.

-- MAYBE PICK UP SOME WORK. AN' MAYBE I WAS SITTIN' ON A GOLDMINE --

SAW WINGED VICTORY

LOVE TO GET CAUGHT BY HER

BOILERMAKER! HA -- BOILERMAKER OUGHTTA FIGHT THE CONFESSOR!

HEY, EYES! I HEAR JIMMY WENT DOWN LAST NIGHT -- ON YOUR LOOKOUT.

THAT AIN'T FAIR, LEV. JACK-IN-THE-BOX -- HE WAS WAITIN' FOR US.

GAGGED ME, THEN IN CAME THE COPS. I BARELY MANAGED TO SLIP AWAY.

YOU? SNUCK OUT ON JACK-IN-THE-BOX?

PULL THE OTHER ONE, EYES!

GO AHEAD, SCOFF! DON'T BELIEVE ME!

IT AIN'T LIKE I'M GONNA HAVE TO PUT UP WITH ANY A' THIS MUCH LONGER...

YOU GOT SOMETHIN', EYES?

YOU ONTO SOMETHIN' WITH MONEY IN IT?

ANYTHING IN IT FOR YOUR BUDDIES?

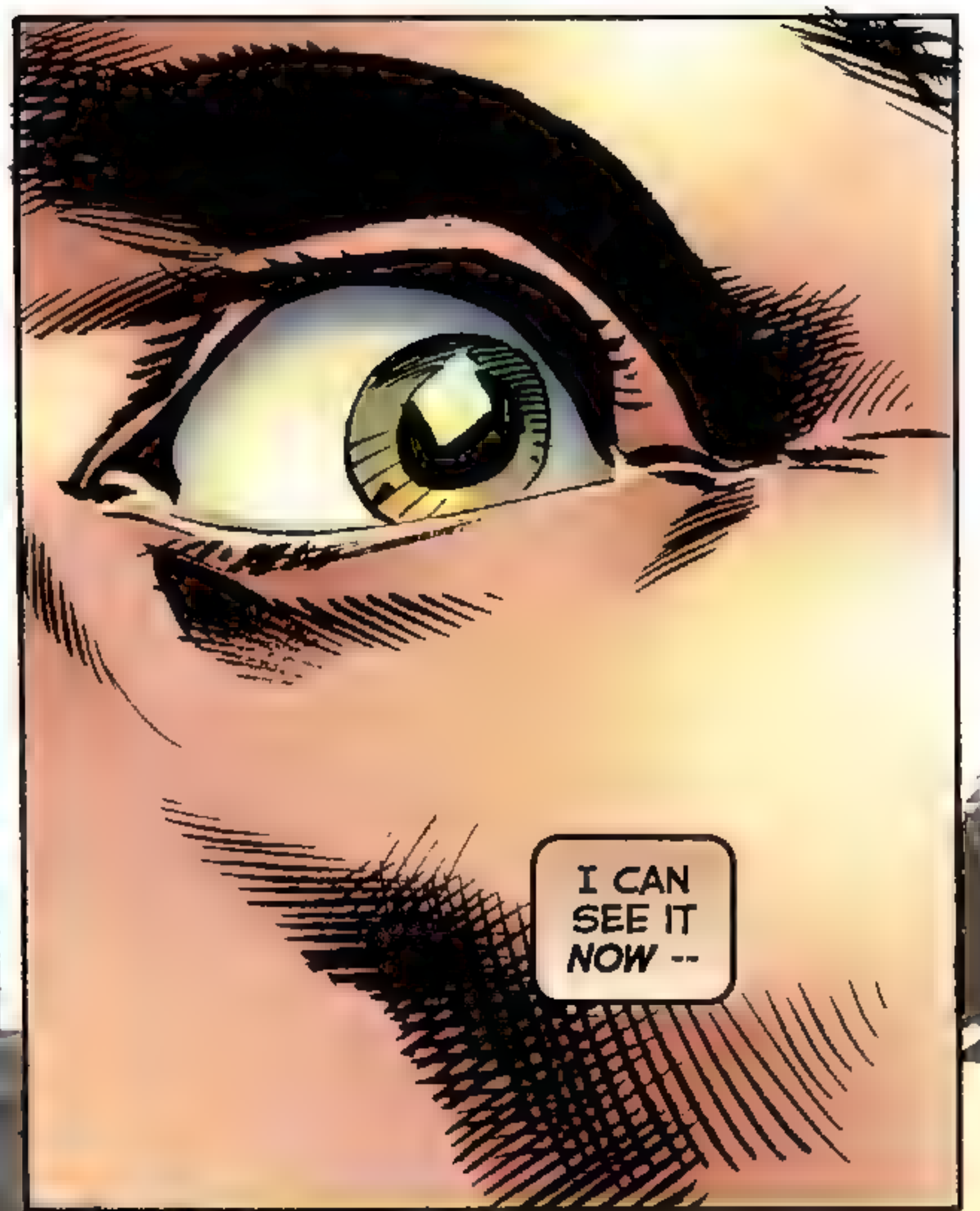


I WAS PLANNIN' TO GET THE GUYS TO HELP ME FIGGER OUT HOW TO SELL JACK'S I.D. TO THE DEACON --

UH --

-- BUT THAT WON'T PLAY --

-- THEY'D CUT ME OUT OF THE DEAL AS SOON AS THEY GOT THE CHANCE.



I CAN SEE IT NOW --



GUYS...

GUYS...

OH, LOOK -- IT'S A RUFFIAN OF SOME SORT!

HE TRIED TO TOUCH MY NEW SUIT!

I'LL HAVE THE CHAUFFEUR ROUGH HIM UP AND TOSS HIM INTO THE RIVER. SUCH IMPERTINENCE.

IT'S NOT LIKE I WOULDN'T DO THE SAME MYSELF.



UH, IT'S NOTHIN', GUYS. I GOT AN OFFER TO DO SOME WORK ON MY AUNT'S HOUSE, OUT IN CALIFORNIA.

I'M THINKIN' ABOUT IT. LIKE A VACATION, Y'KNOW?



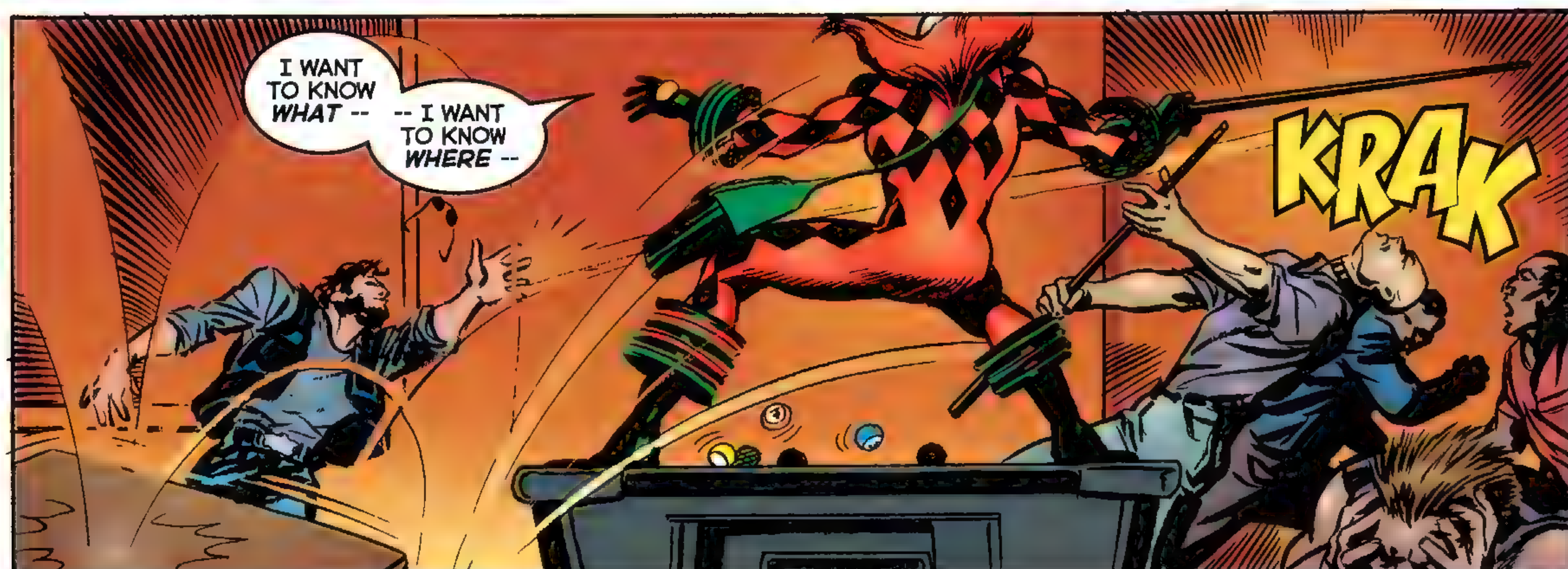
YEAH, RIGHT. LIKE A VACATION.

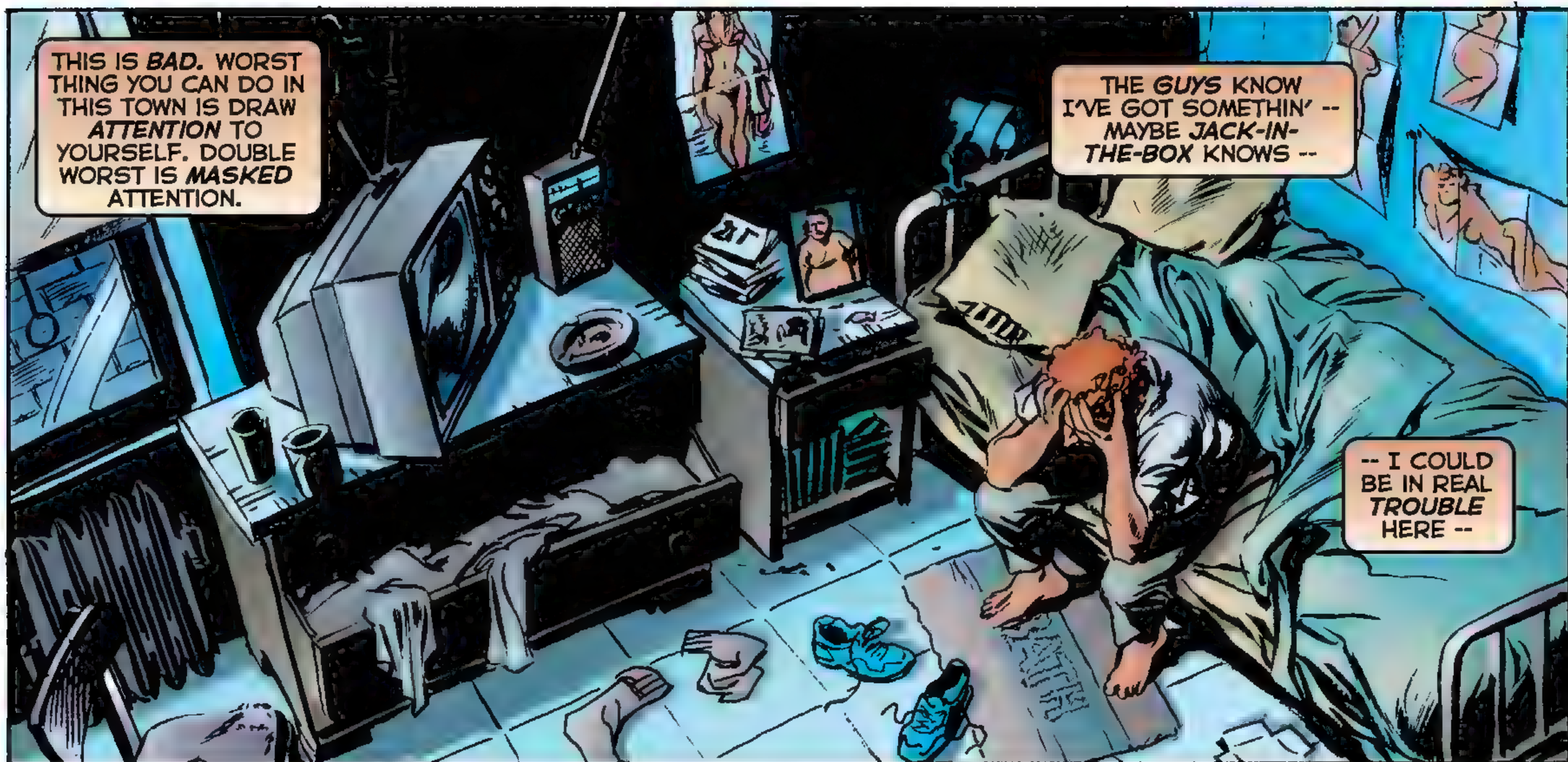
UH - HUH.

WORKIN' ON HER HOUSE.

GUYS, HONEST -- IT AIN'T --

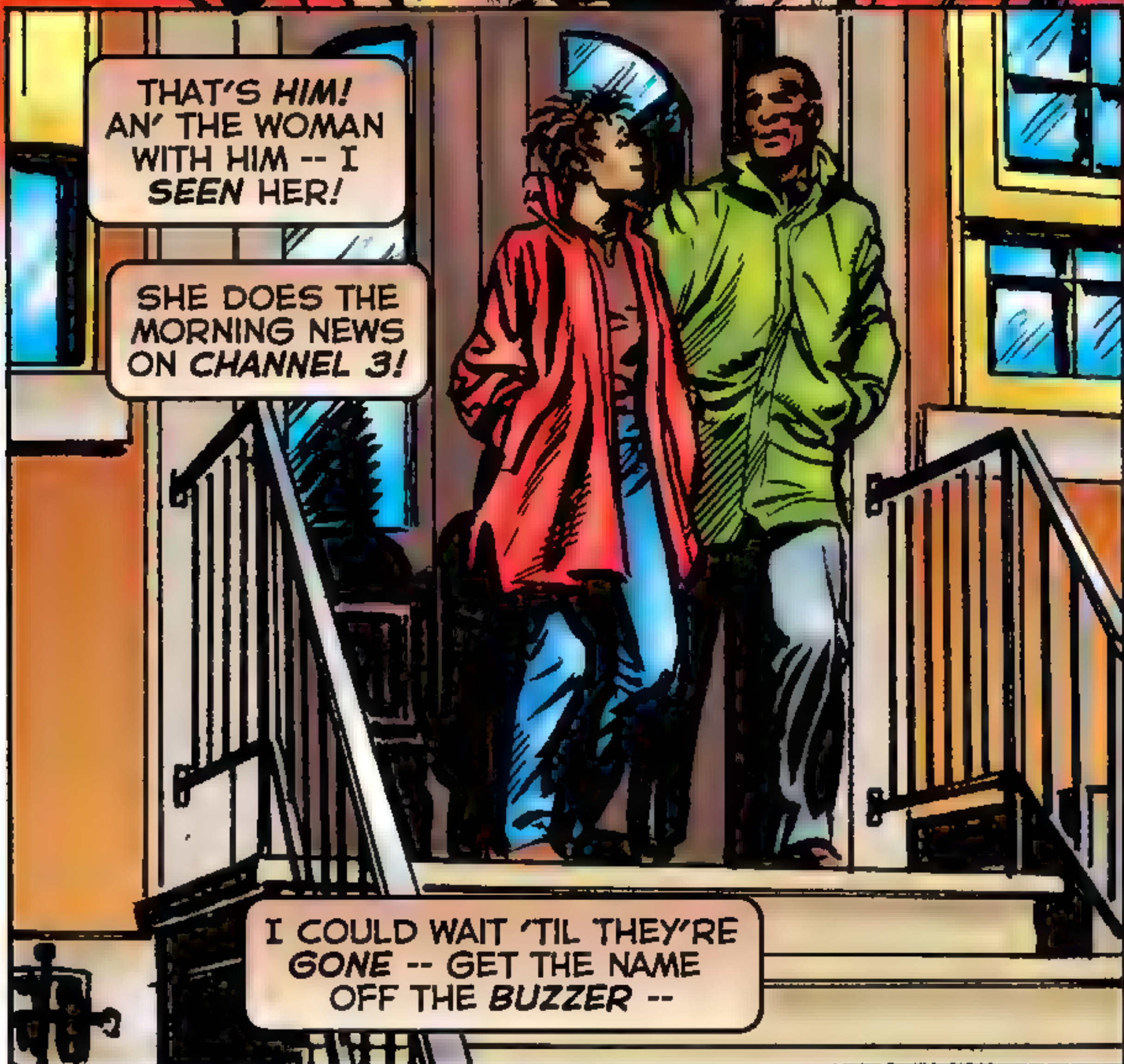








-- ELDER'S GYM
WAS RIGHT
AROUND -- HEY!



THAT'S HIM!
AN' THE WOMAN
WITH HIM -- I
SEEN HER!

SHE DOES THE
MORNING NEWS
ON CHANNEL 3!

I COULD WAIT 'TIL THEY'RE
GONE -- GET THE NAME
OFF THE BUZZER --



-- BUT A LOTTA PEOPLE
DON'T LABEL THEIR
BUZZERS, AND --

'SCUSE
ME -- UH --
COULD I HAVE AN
AUTOGRAPH?



SURE -- WHO
SHOULD I SIGN
IT TO?

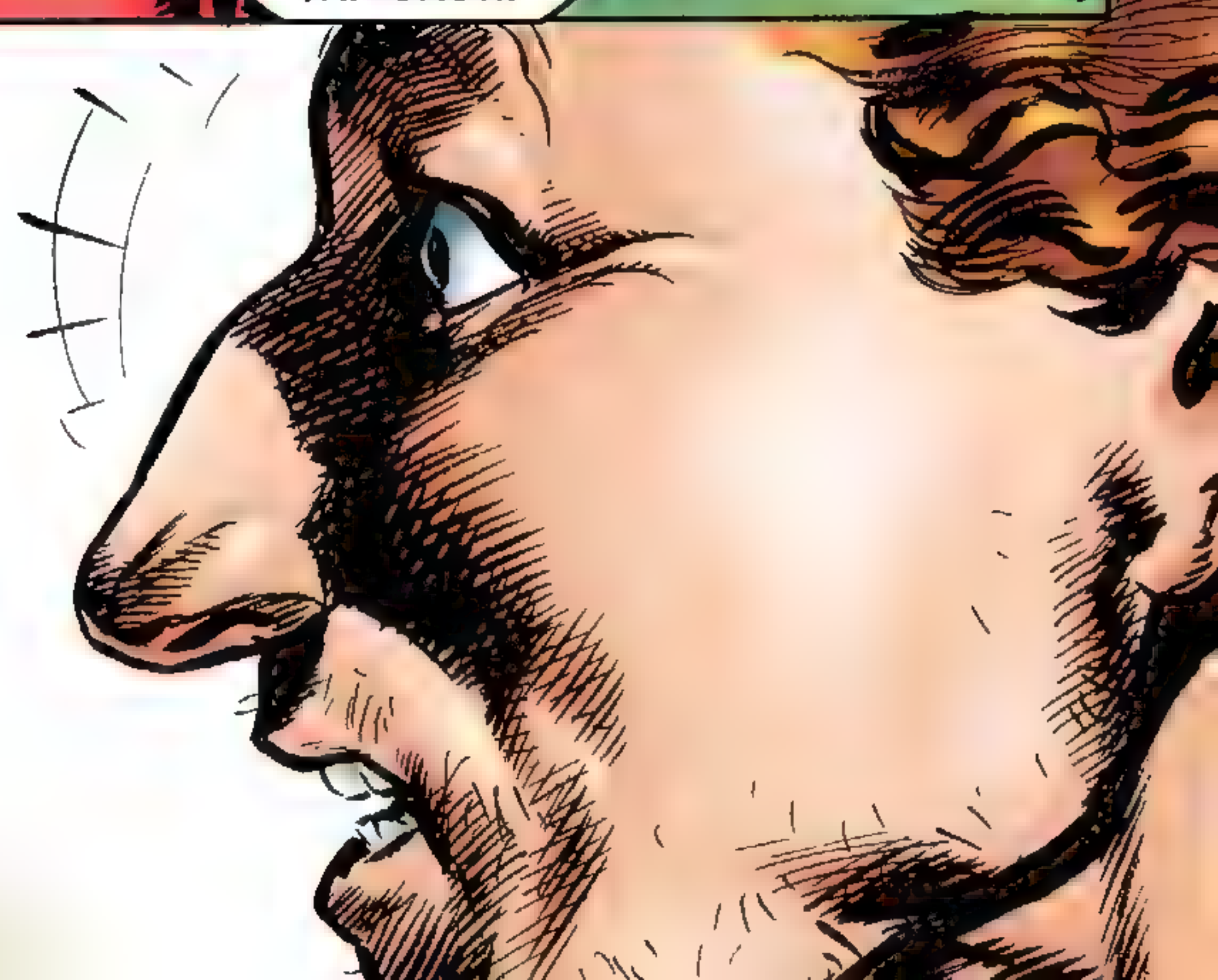
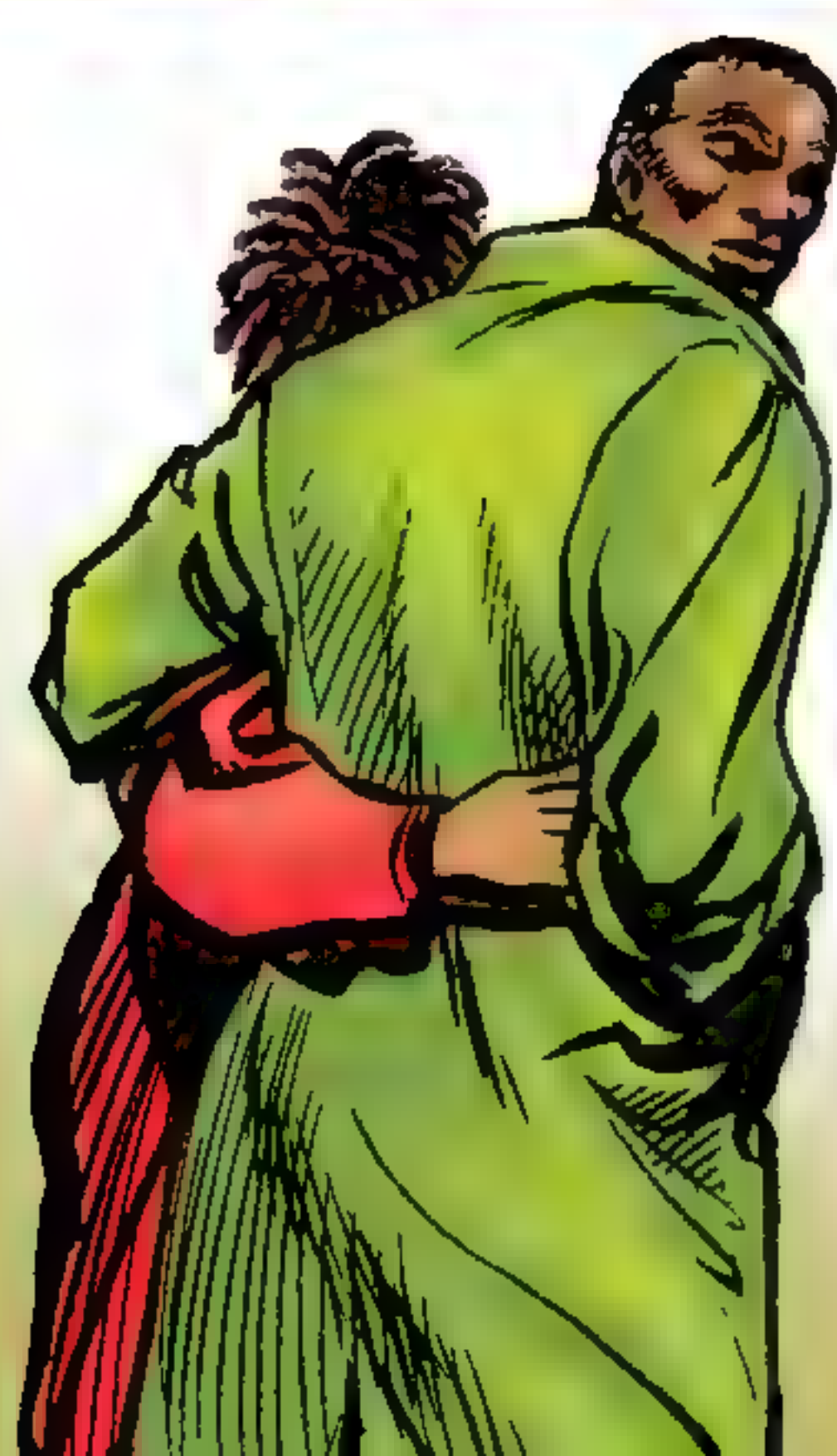
UH, UM --
JACK. JACK...
BACHSINGER.



THERE YOU GO, MISTER
BACHSINGER.

THANKS.

NO, THANK
YOU -- JUST
KEEP WATCHING
THE SHOW!





THAT WAS STUPID! STUPID! BACHSINGER -- WHY DIDN'T I JUST SAY "JACK INNABOX" AND SLIT MY THROAT RIGHT IN FRONT OF 'EM?!

OH, MAN, I'M IN TROUBLE...

I FIND HER IN THE ROCKET'S METRO SECTION A YEAR BACK -- TAMRA DIXON.



SHE'S ATTENDING SOME CHARITY THING WITH HER HUSBAND -- ZACHARY JOHNSON, "OWNER AND CEO OF THE SMALL-BUT GROWING Z.J. TOYS."

I GOT HIM.



BUT -- DOES HE GOT ME?

EVEN IF HE HADN'T SEEN ME -- JACK BACHSINGER?

GEEZ, I CAN SEE IT NOW --



EYES -- OH, EYES -- !

SOME PEOPLE SEE TOO MUCH, EYES -- !

KA-PLINK KA-PLINK KA-PLINK



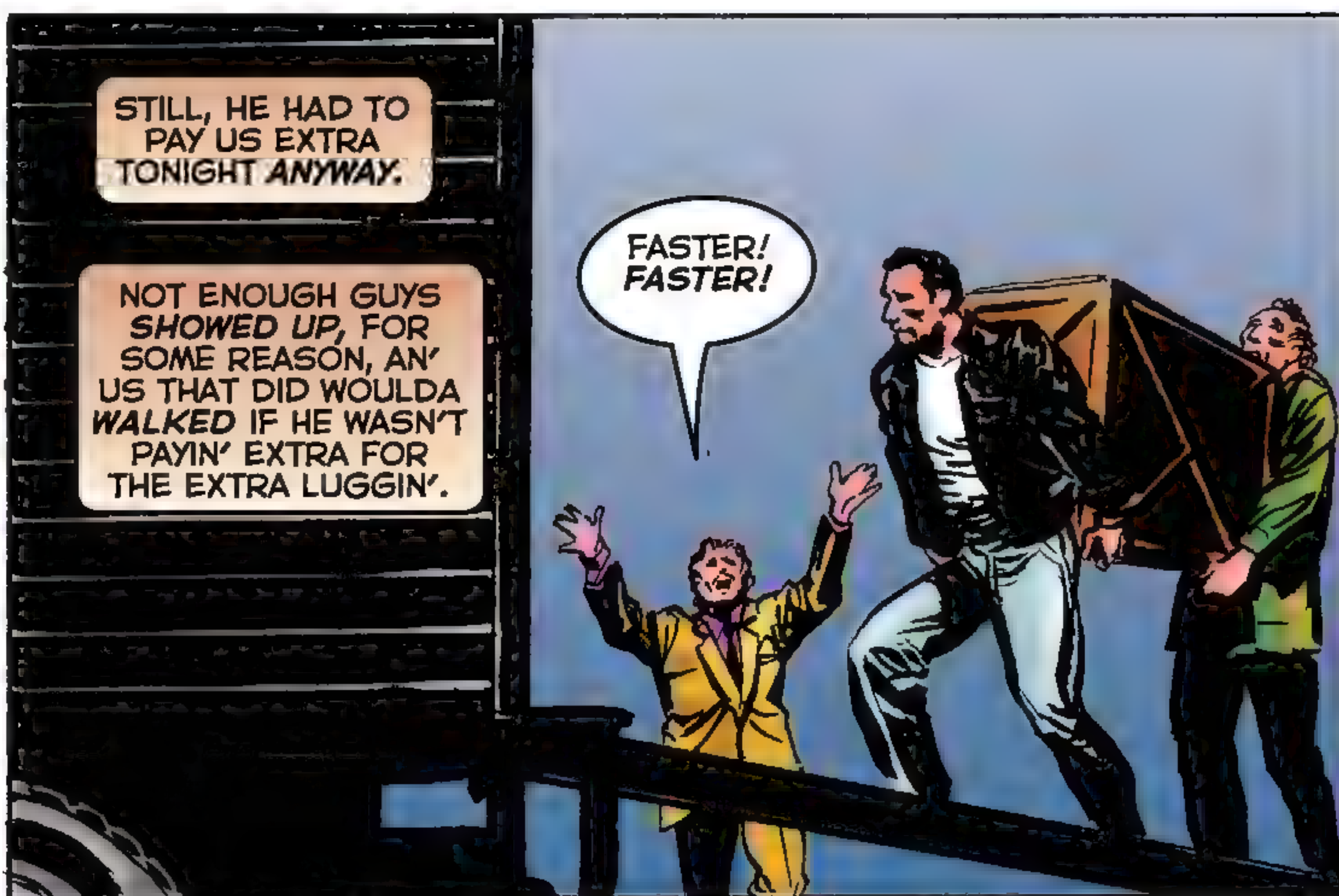
WORD IS, SAMARITAN BUSTED UP SOME PYRAMID BASE IN TURKEY, AN' ALL THEIR WEAPONS AN' STUFF GOT CONFISCATED. BUT THEY KIND OF "FELL OFF A TRUCK" --

-- AN' THAT'S HOW THE MIDDLEMAN GOT 'EM. HE NEVER ADMITS ANYTHING LIKE THAT --

-- I THINK HE FIGGERS HE'LL HAVE TO PAY US MORE IF WE KNOW IT'S IMPORTANT --



-- BUT THAT'S HOW HE GETS MOST OF HIS STUFF.



STILL, HE HAD TO PAY US EXTRA TONIGHT ANYWAY.

NOT ENOUGH GUYS SHOWED UP, FOR SOME REASON, AN' US THAT DID WOULD'VE WALKED IF HE WASN'T PAYIN' EXTRA FOR THE EXTRA LUGGIN'.

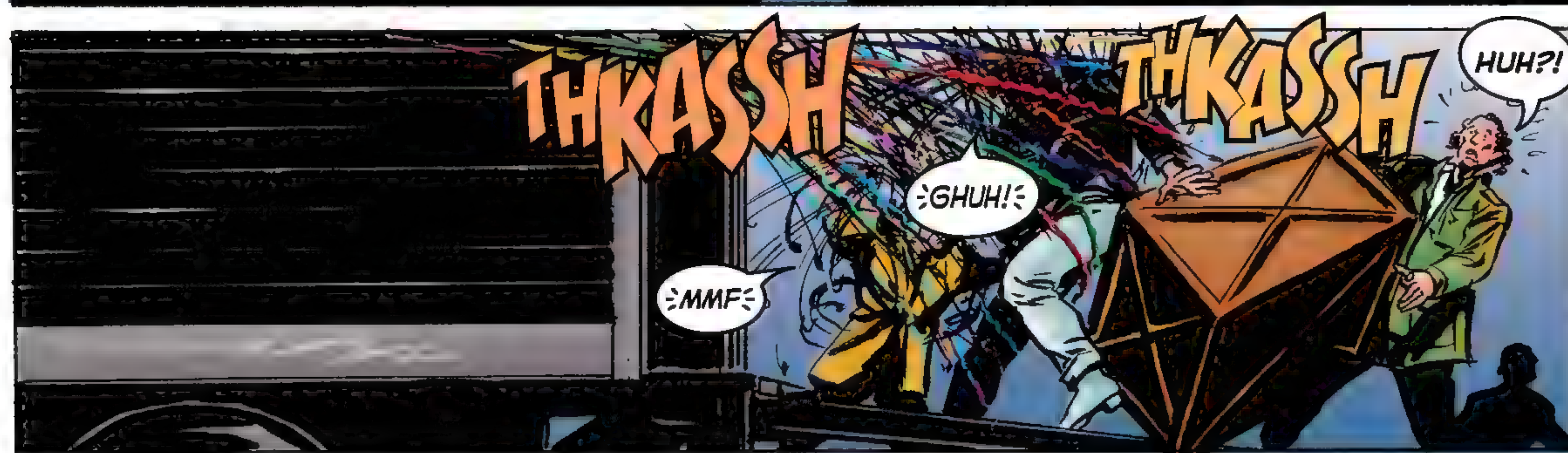
FASTER!
FASTER!



I WONDER WHY NOBODY MUCH SHOWED UP? THE WORK'S A PAIN, BUT THE MONEY SPENDS JUST AS GOOD AS ANY OTHER --

THE TRUCKS ARE RENTALS! WE'VE GOT TO BE DONE AND GONE IN --

-- AN' IT'S NOT LIKE THERE'S A BOXIN' MATCH ON OR ANY --



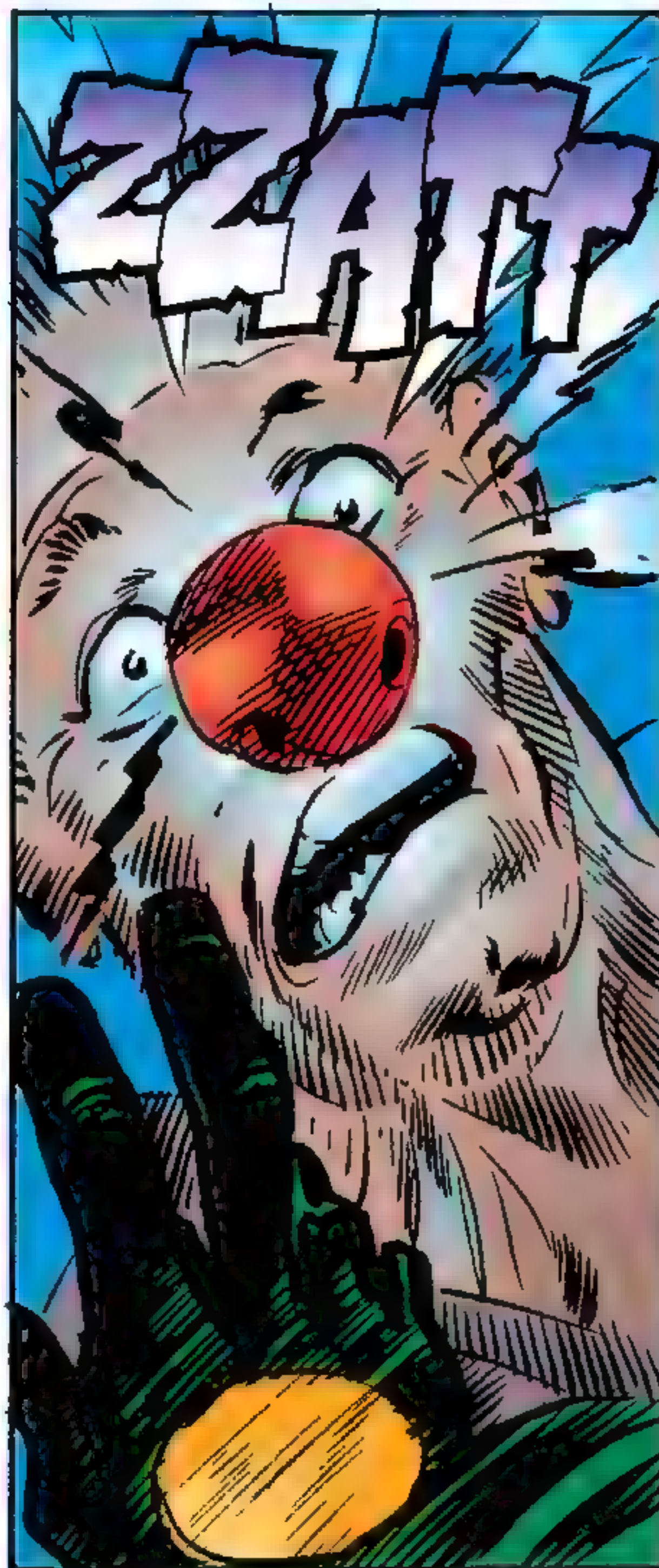
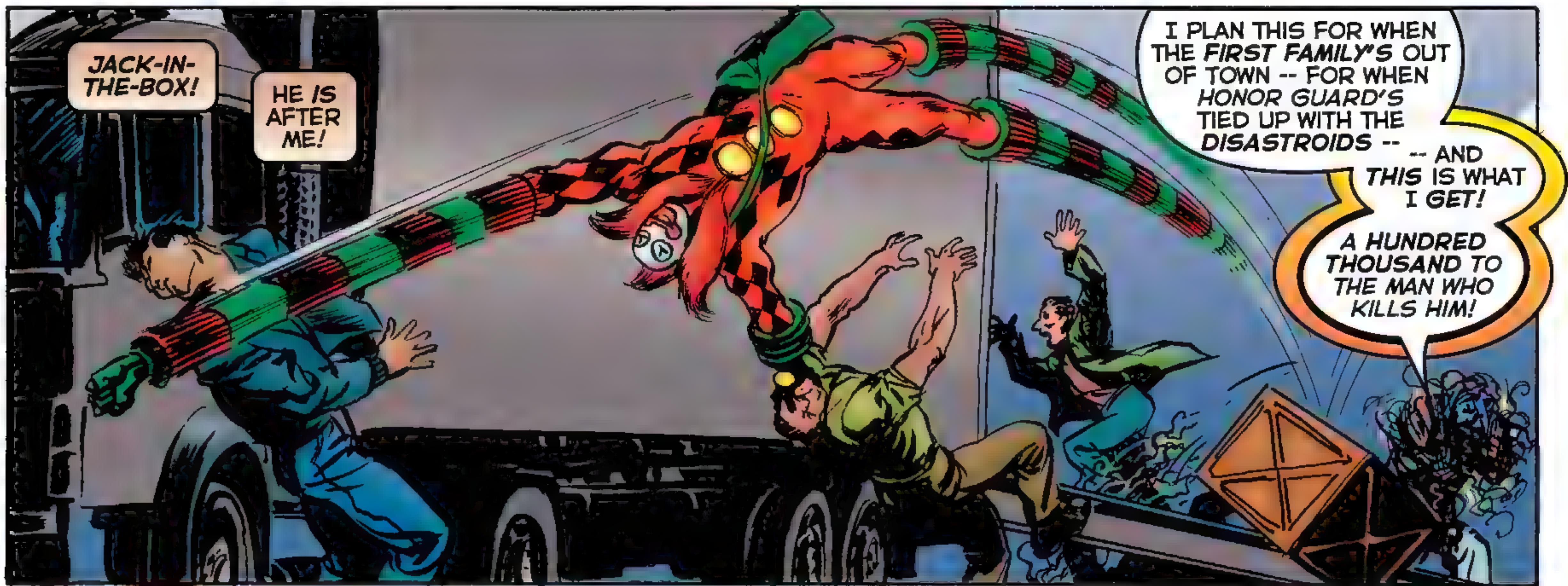
THKASSH

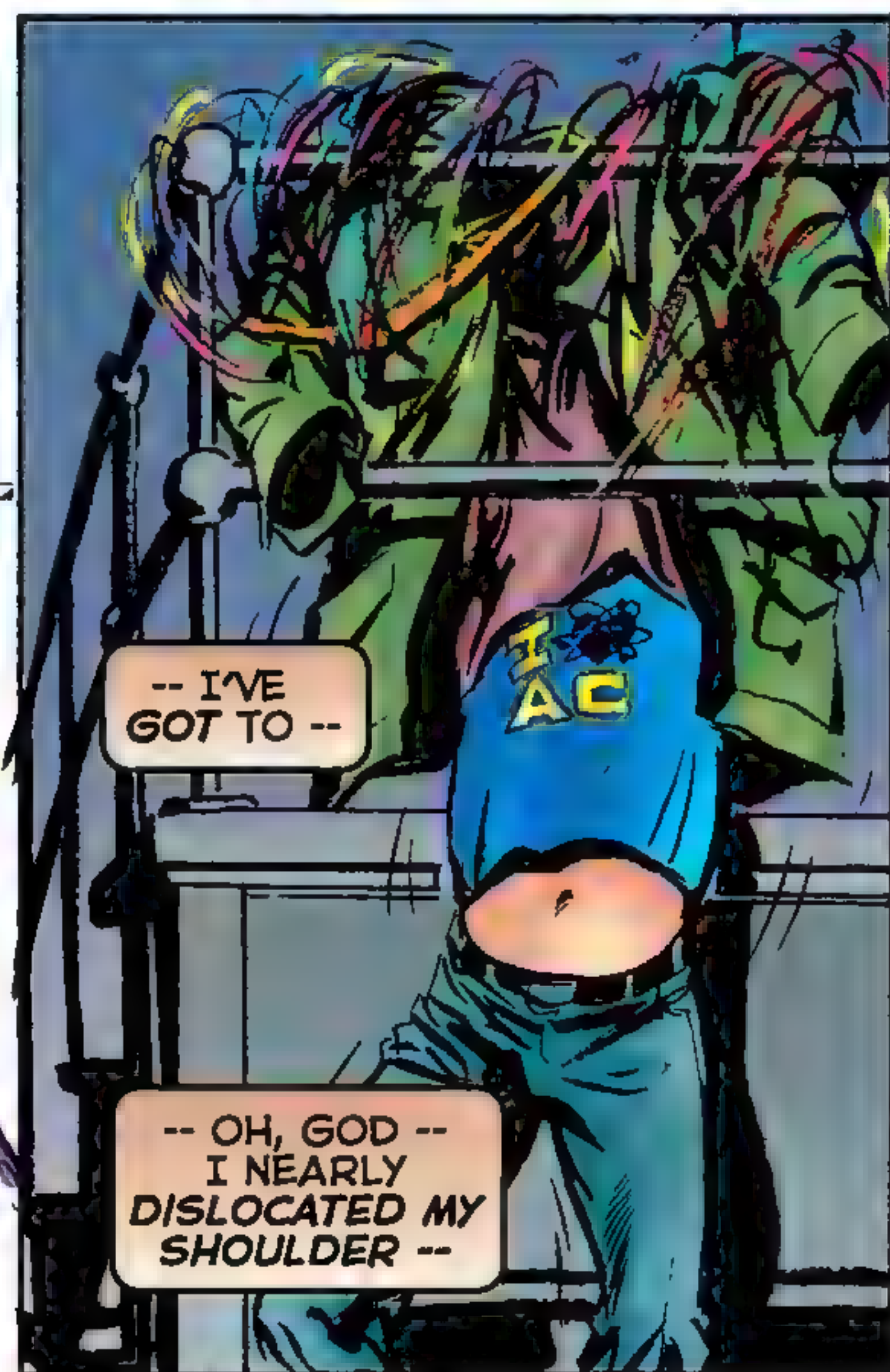
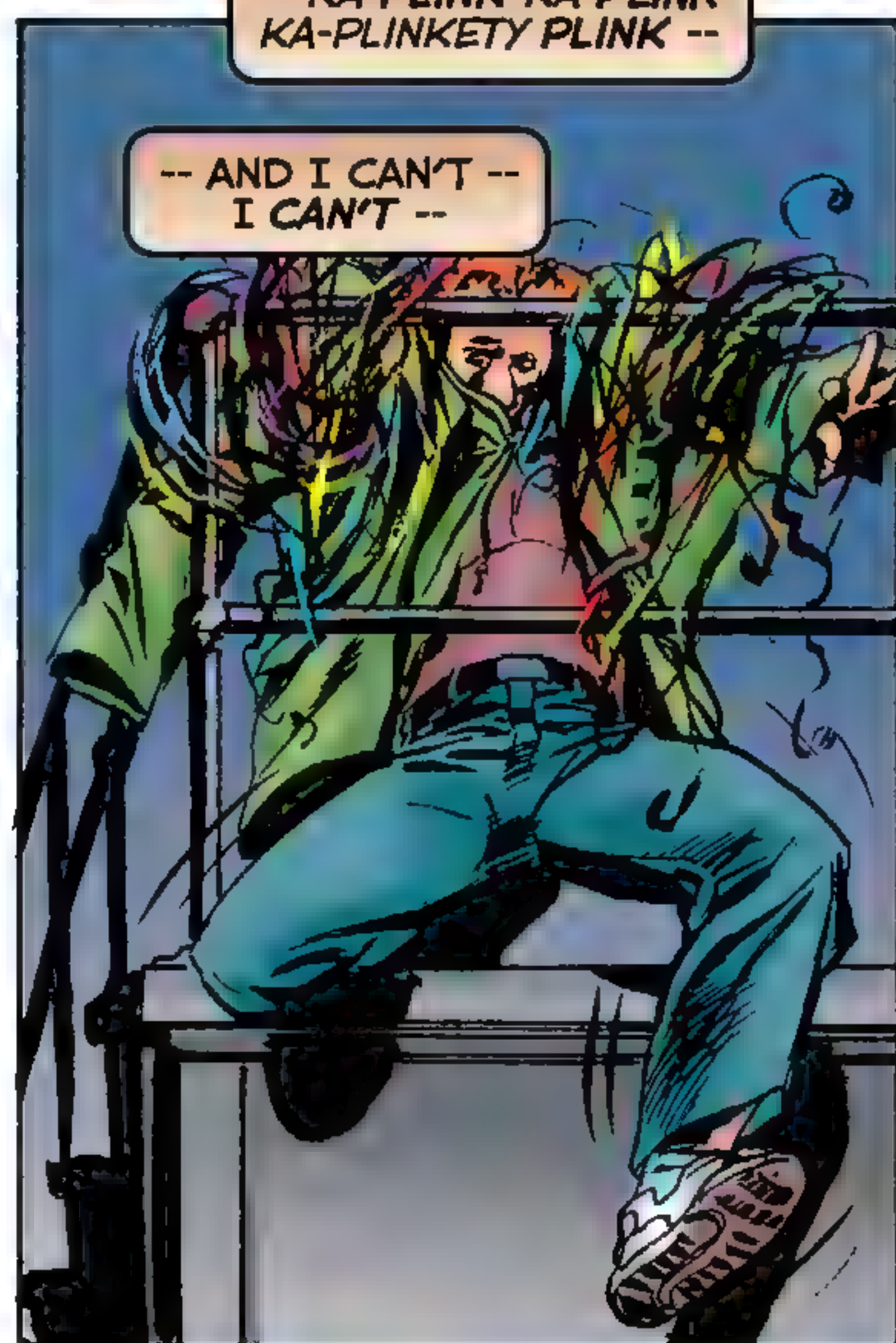
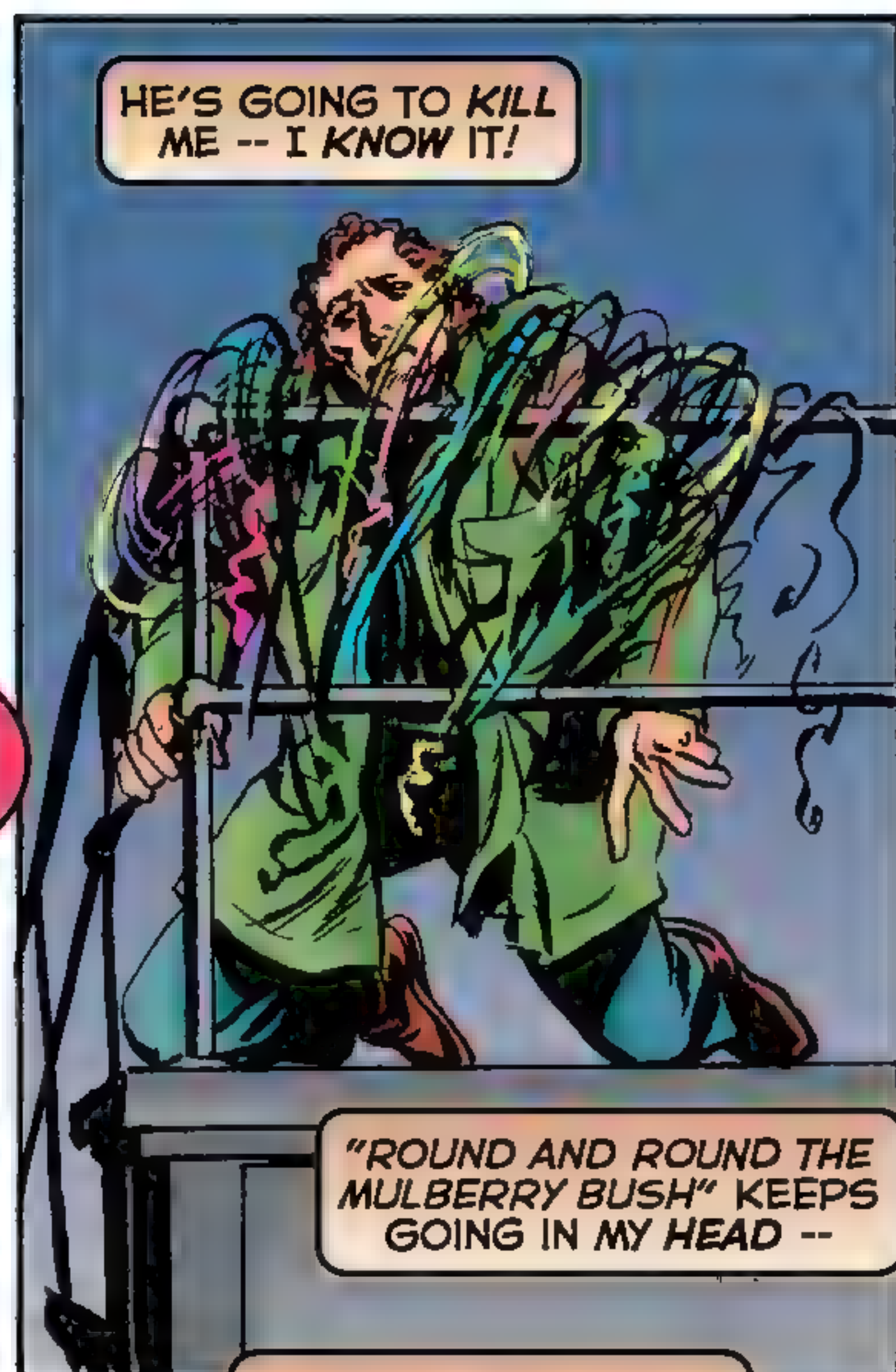
THKASSH

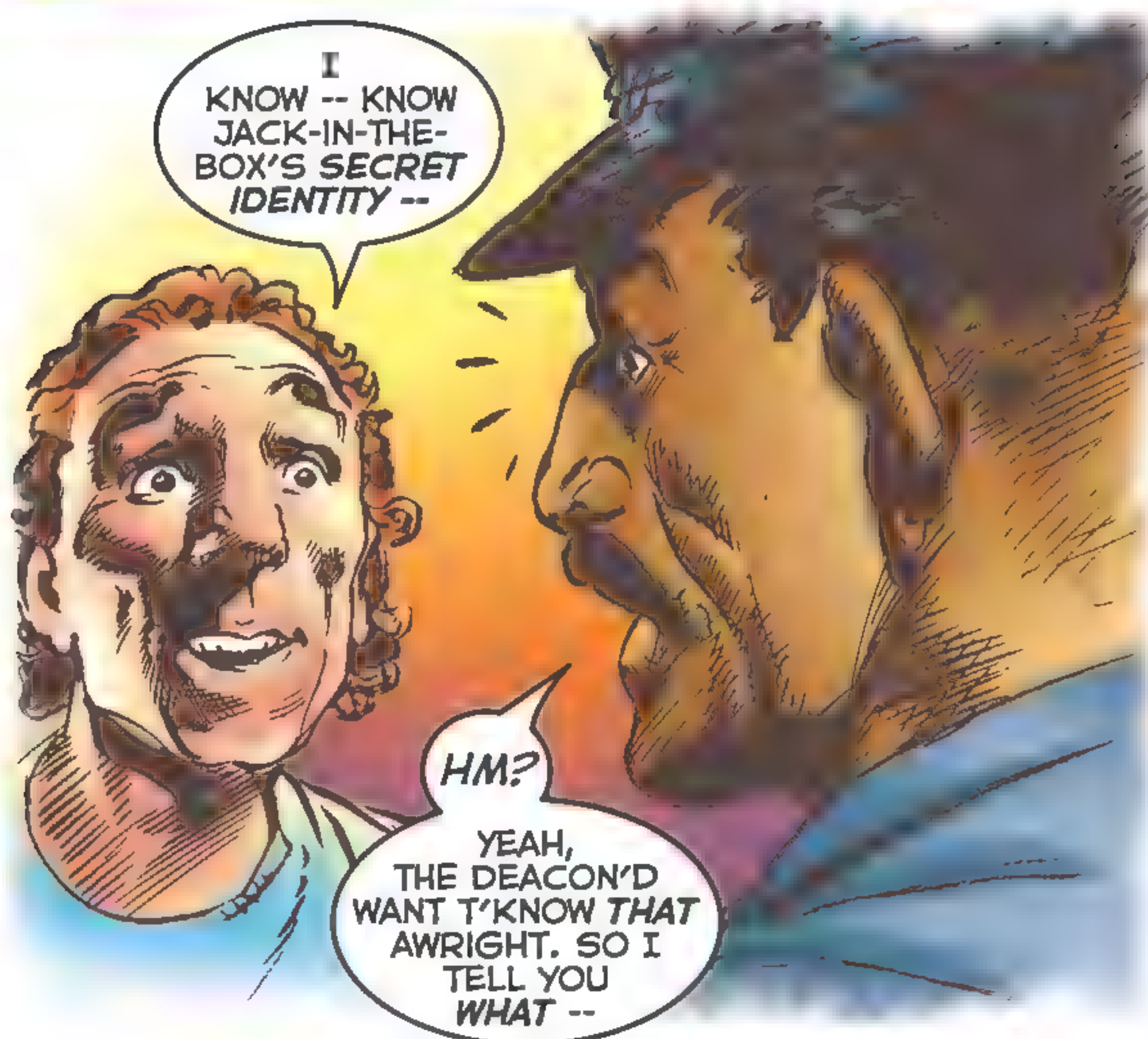
GHUH!

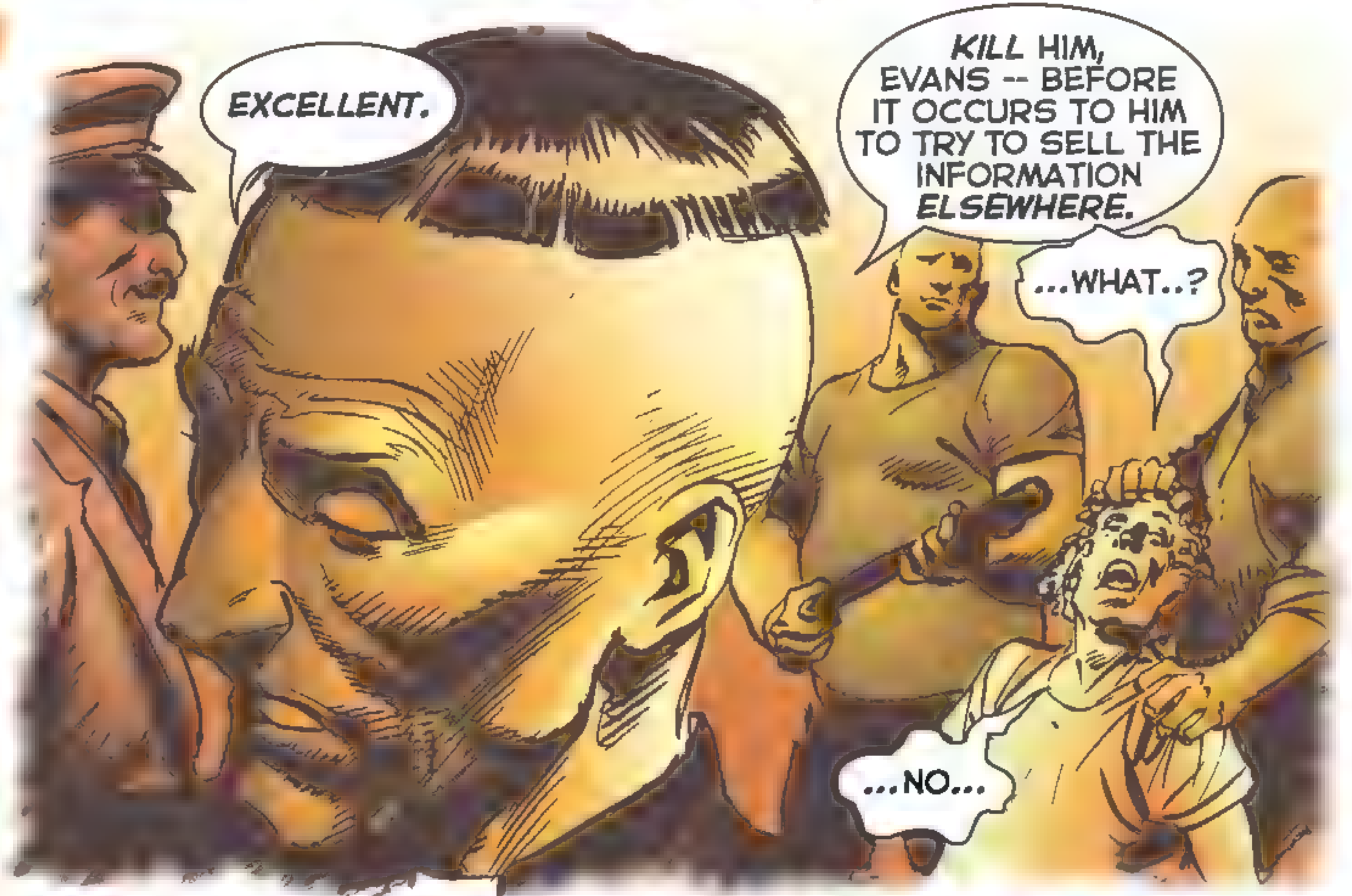
MMF

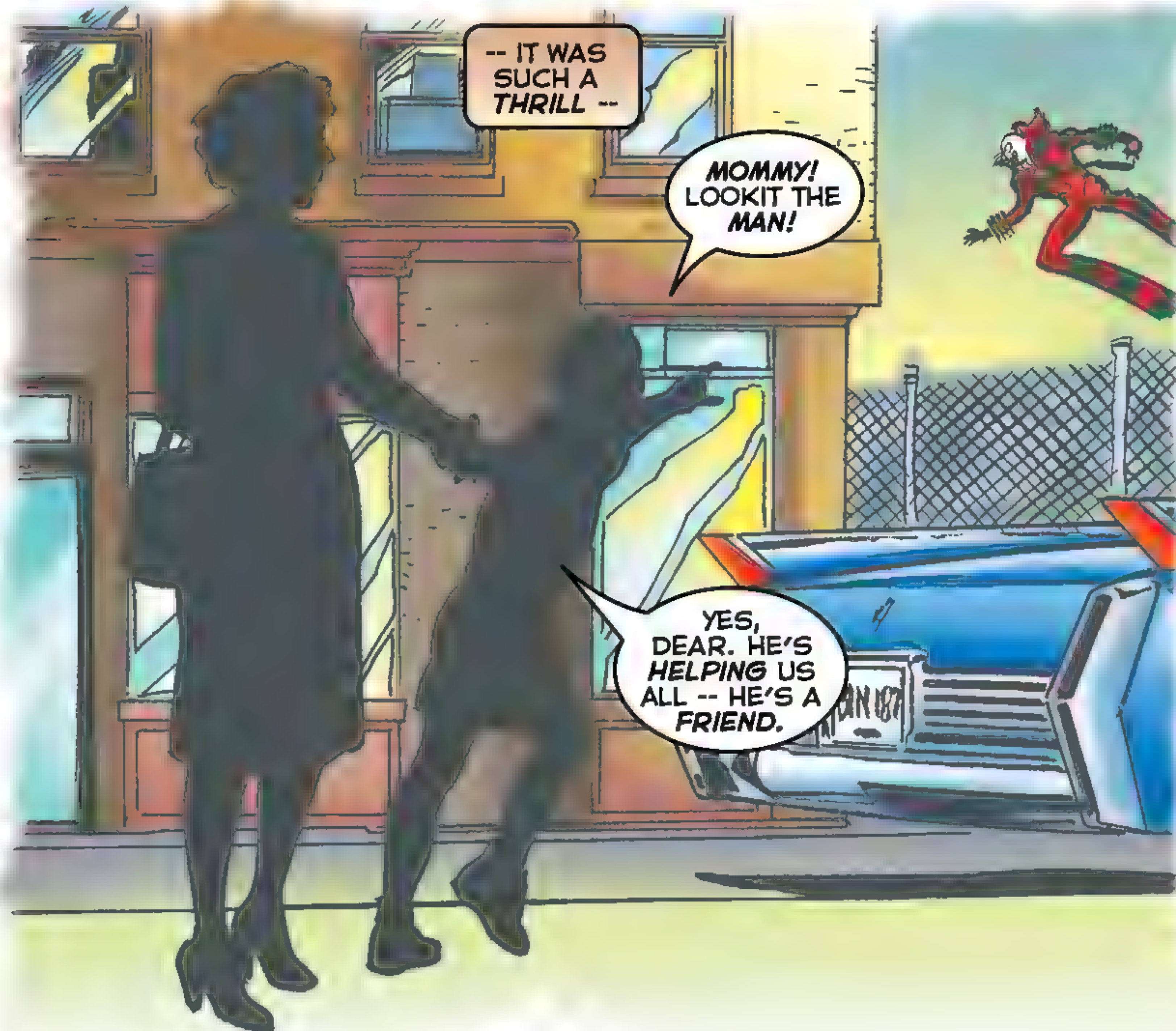
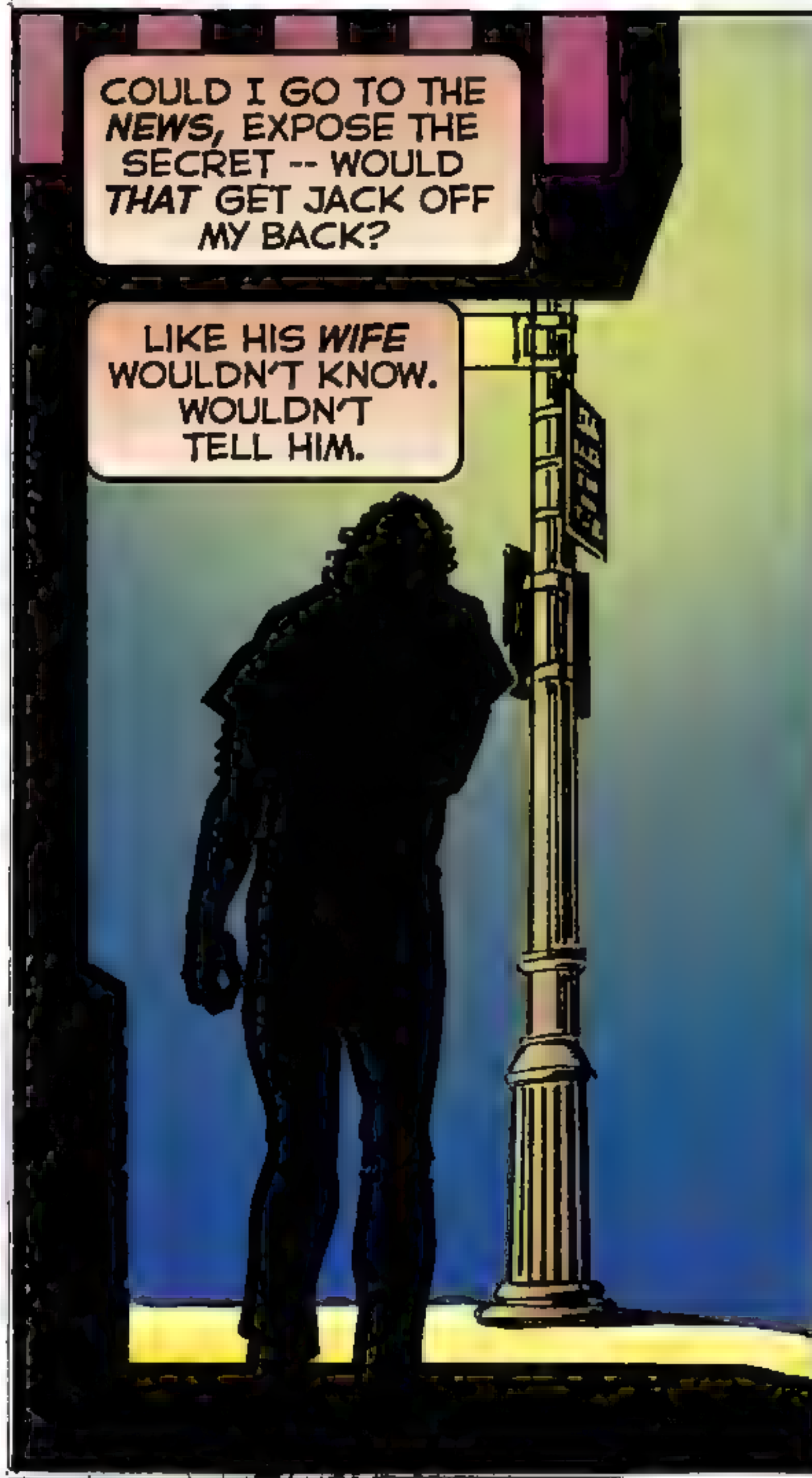
HUH?!



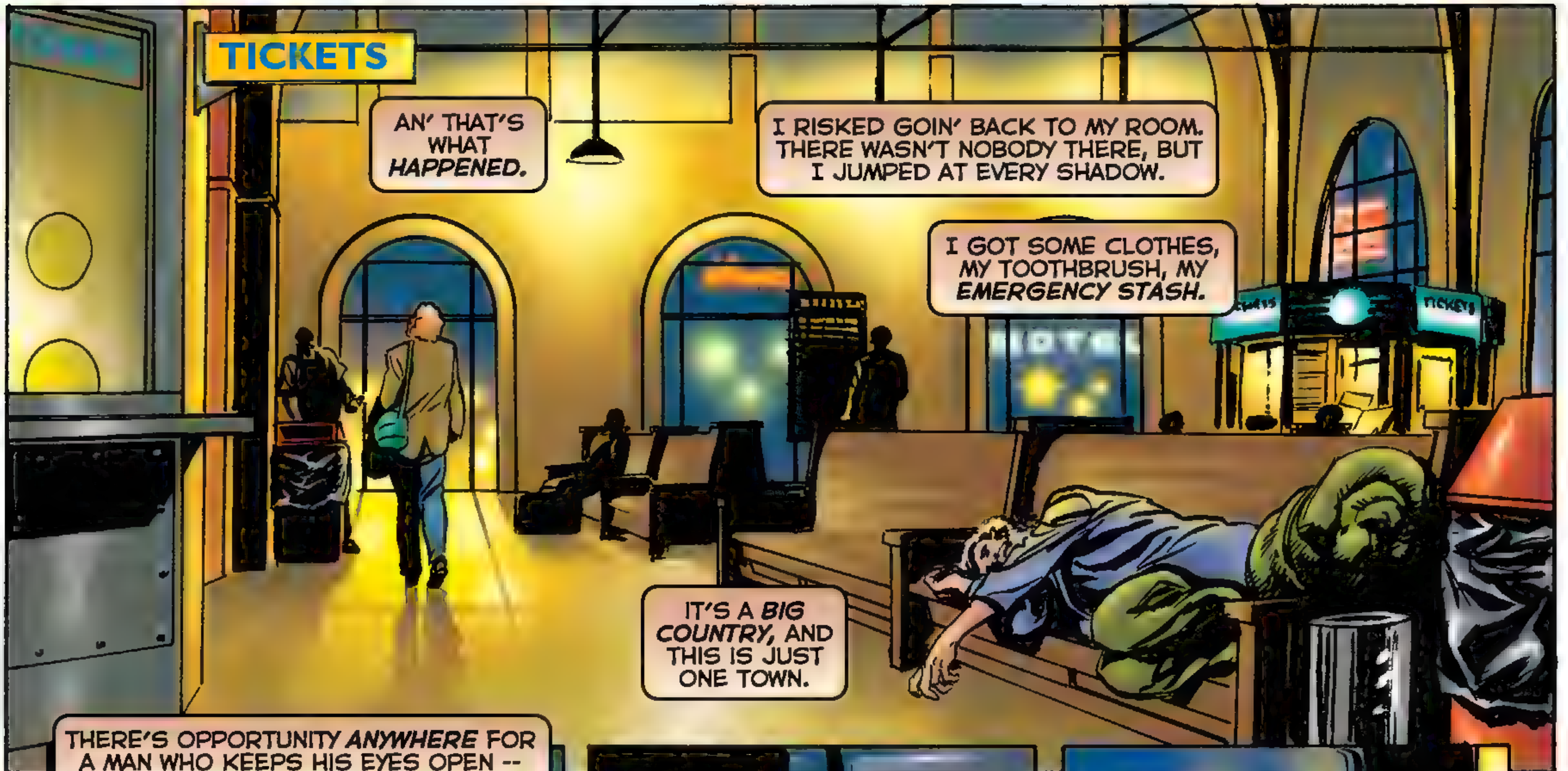












TICKETS

AN' THAT'S
WHAT
HAPPENED.

I RISKED GOIN' BACK TO MY ROOM.
THERE WASN'T NOBODY THERE, BUT
I JUMPED AT EVERY SHADOW.

I GOT SOME CLOTHES,
MY TOOTHBRUSH, MY
EMERGENCY STASH.

IT'S A BIG
COUNTRY, AND
THIS IS JUST
ONE TOWN.

THERE'S OPPORTUNITY ANYWHERE FOR
A MAN WHO KEEPS HIS EYES OPEN --



-- FOR A
SHARP-EYED
MAN WHO --



SHF

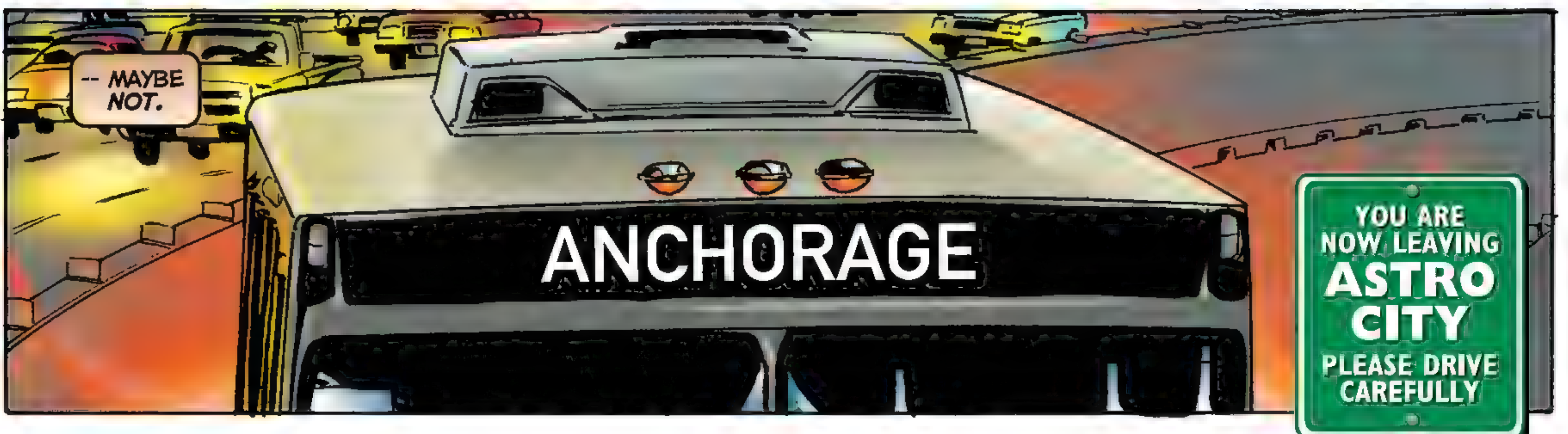


-- NO.



ON THE
OTHER
HAND --

VMMMMMM



-- MAYBE
NOT.

ANCHORAGE

YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY



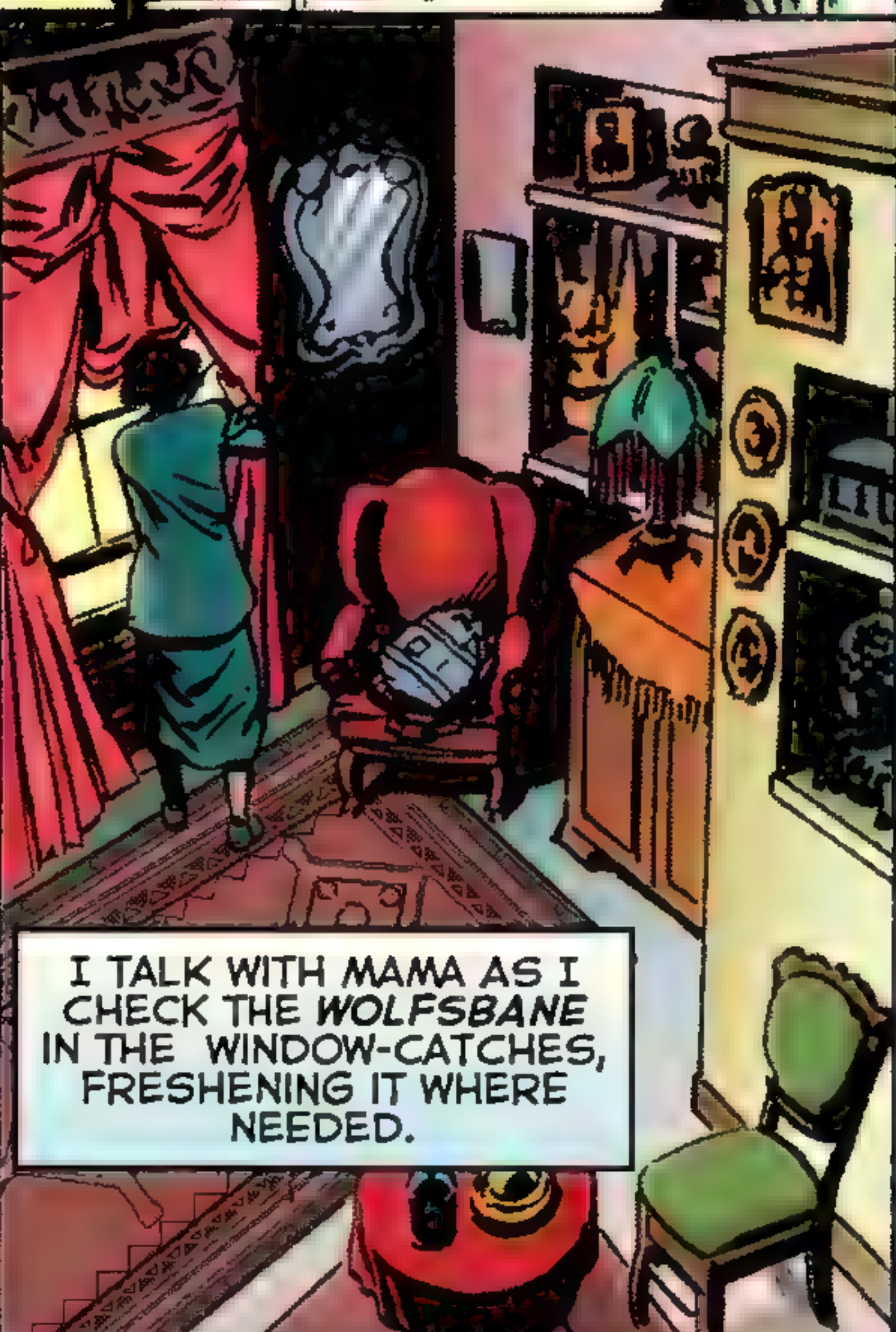
4



WOW

MORNING IN *SHADOW HILL*, BELOW THE LOOMING BULK OF MOUNT KIRBY'S EASTERN FACE -- *SHADOW HILL*, WHERE NIGHT FALLS *FIRST* IN *ASTRO CITY*.

BUT *MORNING* COMES TO US AS IT DOES TO *ANYONE*.



I TALK WITH MAMA AS I CHECK THE *WOLFSBANE* IN THE WINDOW-CATCHES, FRESHENING IT WHERE NEEDED.



I TAP MY *CRUCIFIX*, TO REASSURE MYSELF THAT IT'S THERE. I KISS MAMA AND WISH A GOOD DAY FOR HER.



I SAY THE WORDS AND OPEN THE DOOR -- A GOOD OAK DOOR, WITH ASH IN THE FRAME, AND THE SIGN OF *TEUSZ* IN BRASS.

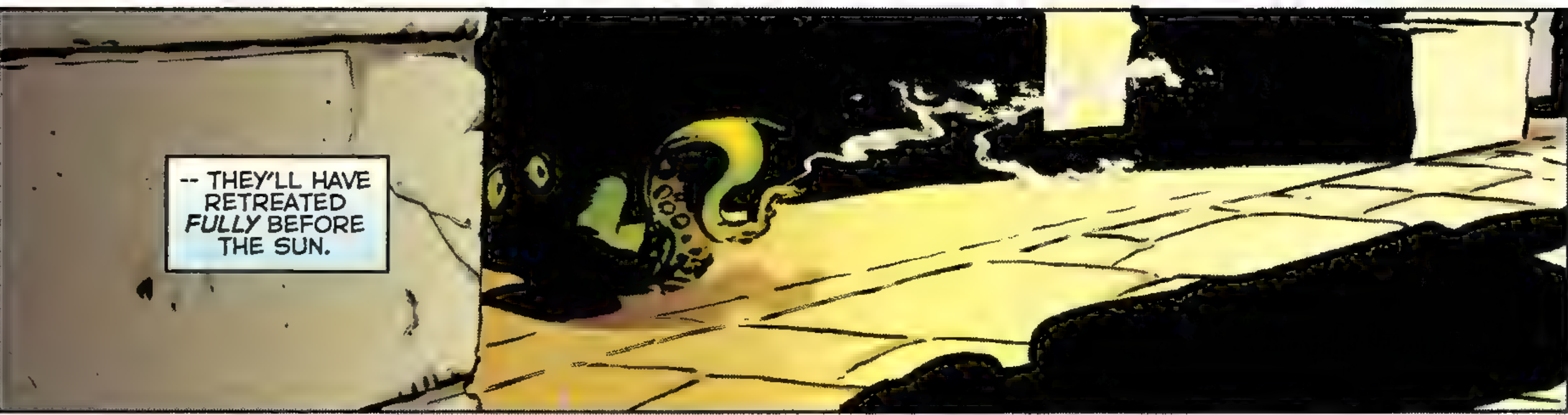
THE AIR SMELLS LIKE *LIFE*, AND LIKE SOMETHING WAKING UP.



I WALK ALONG OUR *COBBLED STREETS*, AS *SHUTTERS* ARE THROWN OPEN TO THE SUN AND THE *BUSTLE* OF THE DAY BEGINS.

THE *LESSER NIGHT CREATURES* STILL CROUCH IN THE SHRINKING SHADOWS, MUTTERING AND SNARLING SOFTLY.

I PAY THEM NO MIND. GUARDED AS I AM, THEY CANNOT *APPROACH* ME, AND IN MINUTES --



-- THEY'LL HAVE RETREATED FULLY BEFORE THE SUN.

THE *HANGED MAN* MAKES THE LAST OF HIS NIGHTLY ROUNDS. I NOD TO HIM, AS ALWAYS, OFFERING THANKS FOR HIS PROTECTIVE VIGIL.

AS ALWAYS, HE MAKES NO SIGN OF ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.

I BUY MY BREAKFAST AT GROZA'S -- A BIALY AND THE THICK, SWEET COFFEE THEY DON'T MAKE DOWNTOWN.

AND THEN THE *BUS* IS HERE, AS PUNCTUAL AS EVER, DRAWING ITS *DAILY PATTERN* THROUGH THE WINDING STREETS.

MORNING, MARTA.

GOOD MORNING, MISTER IRONS.

I AM ALONE, AS ALWAYS. NOT MANY OF US LEAVE THE HILL EACH DAY.


I SWEAR --

-- I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU DO IT. I COULDN'T LIVE UP HERE -- GIVES ME THE WILLIES JUST DRIVING THROUGH THE PLACE.

AND THAT, TOO, IS A PART OF THE *MORNING*. PART OF WHAT I HAVE COME TO THINK OF AS THE RITUAL OF *CHANGE*.

MISTER IRONS'S SIGH OF RELIEF IS A SIGNAL THAT WE HAVE LEFT THE HILL --

-- LEFT THE WORLD WHERE I AM MY PARENTS' CHILD, A DAUGHTER OF MY CULTURE AND A FOLLOWER OF THE OLD RULES --



-- AND ARE APPROACHING
CITY CENTER -- A WORLD
THAT LOOKS TO THE *FUTURE*,
STRAINING FOR THE SKY
WITH A REACH OF
CHROME AND STEEL --

-- A WORLD WHERE I AM
NO LONGER A CHILD, BUT
A WOMAN OF *MY OWN*,
DEFINED BY MY SKILLS AND
WORK AND CHOICES --

-- AND AS MUCH AS
I LOVE *MY HOME* --
MUCH AS I LOVE
MY FAMILY --

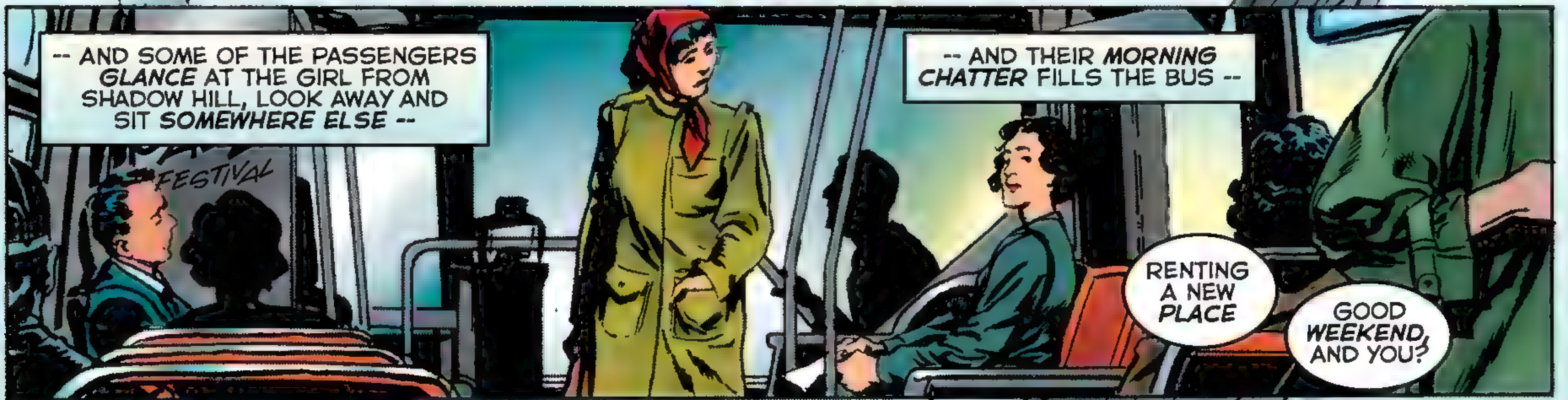
-- I ALSO
LOVE THE
CITY.

Safesword



WE TRAVEL THROUGH THE
OTHER NEIGHBORHOODS,
ON DOWN THE HILL --

-- FASS GARDENS,
RENSIE AVENUE,
DERBYFIELD --

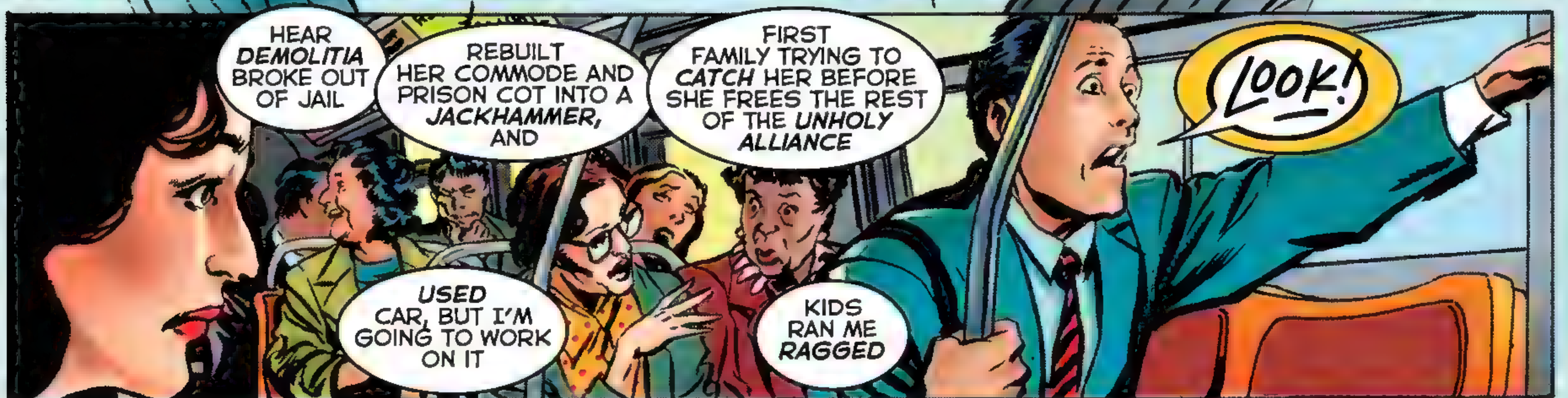


-- AND SOME OF THE PASSENGERS
GLANCE AT THE GIRL FROM
SHADOW HILL, LOOK AWAY AND
SIT SOMEWHERE ELSE --

-- AND THEIR MORNING
CHATTER FILLS THE BUS --

RENTING
A NEW
PLACE

GOOD
WEEKEND,
AND YOU?



HEAR
DEMOLITIA
BROKE OUT
OF JAIL

REBUILT
HER COMMODE AND
PRISON COT INTO A
JACKHAMMER,
AND

FIRST
FAMILY TRYING TO
CATCH HER BEFORE
SHE FREES THE REST
OF THE UNHOLY
ALLIANCE

Look!

USED
CAR, BUT I'M
GOING TO WORK
ON IT

KIDS
RAN ME
RAGGED



IT'S **WINGED**
VICTORY.

THE NEWS SAID
SHE BROKE UP AN
ARMORED-CAR
HIJACKING LAST
NIGHT.

THE SIGHT OF HER, PROUD
AND NOBLE, NEVER FAILS
TO SET MY HEART RACING.
THE WAY SHE SETS HER
OWN COURSE, FREE OF
GRAVITY, OF RULES --

-- THE WAY SHE DOES WHAT
SHE THINKS IS *RIGHT*, WITHOUT
A CARE FOR TRADITION, OR
THE APPROVAL OF OTHERS --

-- SHE MAKES ME
FEEL LIKE I CAN
DO ANYTHING.

LOVELY,
JUST
LOVELY.

TROUBLE,
IF YOU ASK
ME

CAMPS
OF HERS --
INDOCTRINATING
CHILDREN

NOTHING
BUT A CULT
LEADER

DANGEROUS

HONESTLY!
WOULD YOU LISTEN
TO YOURSELVES?
WINGED VICTORY'S JUST
CAPTURED SOME
CRIMINALS --

-- AND THIS
IS THE THANKS
SHE GETS?
MUTTERINGS AND
SLANDERS?

I SHUDDER
TO THINK WHAT
WE'D DO *WITHOUT*
THEM -- WITHOUT
ALL OF THEM!

THE OTHERS FALL
SILENT AT THAT, AS
WELL THEY SHOULD --

-- AND WE TRAVEL ON UNTIL WE
REACH *BINDERBECK PLAZA*,
WHERE MOST OF US WORK.

I HAVE
ALWAYS LIKED
BINDERBECK
PLAZA --

-- IT WAS ONCE THE *DUTCH*
SECTION OF TOWN, BUT
GREW AND CHANGED TO
BECOME THE *HEART OF*
THE CITY --

-- REPLACED BY AN *INDEPENDENT*
YOUNG WOMAN -- A PART OF THE
ENERGY AND SPIRIT THAT GIVE
THE CITY LIFE.

-- JUST AS, BY THIS
TIME, THE GIRL FROM
SHADOW HILL IS
NO MORE --

BUT PERHAPS I
OVER-ROMANTICIZE.

I AM, AFTER ALL, MERELY
A *JUNIOR CLERK* IN THE
ACCOUNTING DEPARTMENT
OF ONE OF THE CITY'S
LARGER LAW FIRMS --

GRANT, MILLER, CONROY
McCONNELL & INGERSOL

-- NOT LIKE *DARCY
CONROY*, MY BOSS --
AND THE FIRM'S
BRIGHTEST STAR.

WE'RE
ROLLING!

BUT
DON'T YOU
WORRY ABOUT
THE *DANGER*,
MS. CONROY?
AFTER
ALL --

SHE'S A CELEBRITY --
THE FIANCEE OF *NICK
FURST*, OF THE *FIRST
FAMILY*. I ENVY HER
POISE IN THE PUBLIC
SPOTLIGHT --

-- THE WAY SHE WALKS
THROUGH THE WORLD
LIKE IT *BELONGS* TO HER.

-- ALL
THE *FIRST
FAMILY'S* ENEMIES
KNOW WHERE
TO *FIND*
YOU...

I DON'T
WORRY ABOUT
THAT, STEVE --
I'M NOT THE TYPE
TO *HIDE* FROM
TROUBLE.

BESIDES,
YOU SEE THIS
BROOCH? *NICKIE*
GAVE IT TO
ME.

IT LOOKS
LIKE IT'S JUST
A *PIN*, BUT IF I
TURN THE DESIGN
IN THE FRAME
LIKE --

-- WELL,
I WON'T DO
IT NOW, BUT IF
I *DID*, IT WOULD
SET OFF ALL KINDS
OF ALARMS AT
NICKIE'S HEAD-
QUARTERS --

-- AND
HE'D KNOW
TO COME
A'RUNNING.

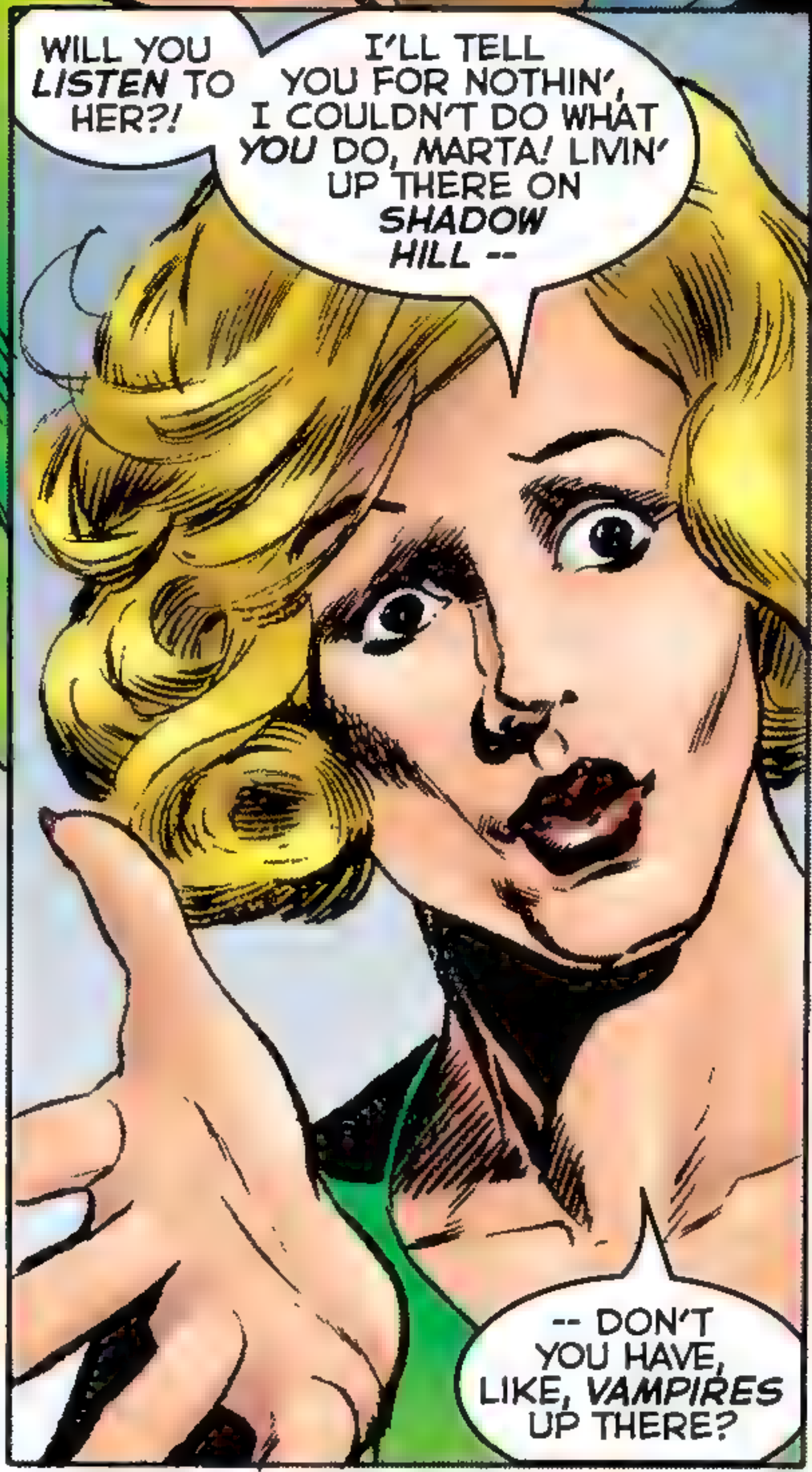


SHE SPOKE TO ME, ONCE. SMILED AT ME.

HEY, MARTA -- I THINK THE CAMERAS CAUGHT YOU!

YOU GONNA BE TAPING THE NEWS TONIGHT?

IT'S CHANNEL 4, BILLY -- WE DON'T GET IT UP ON THE HILL.



WILL YOU LISTEN TO HER?!

I'LL TELL YOU FOR NOTHIN', I COULDN'T DO WHAT YOU DO, MARTA! LVIN' UP THERE ON SHADOW HILL --

-- DON'T YOU HAVE, LIKE, VAMPIRES UP THERE?

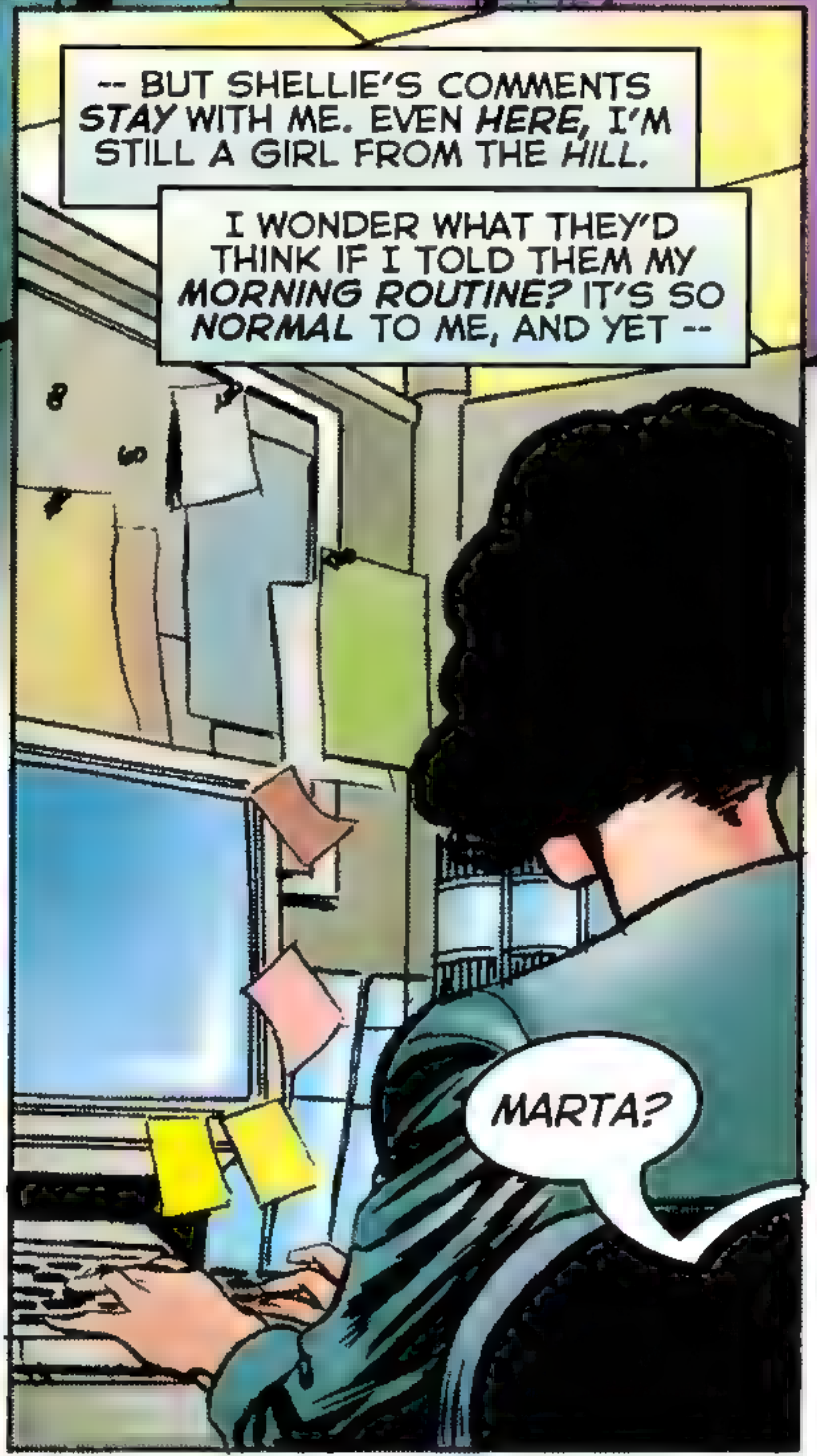


SOME. THEY'RE NOT AS BAD AS YOU THINK, THOUGH.

I GREW UP THERE. I GUESS I'M JUST USED TO IT.

"NOT AS BAD AS YOU THINK!" LISTEN TO HER!

I SMILE, AND GO ABOUT MY WORK --



-- BUT SHELLIE'S COMMENTS STAY WITH ME. EVEN HERE, I'M STILL A GIRL FROM THE HILL.

I WONDER WHAT THEY'D THINK IF I TOLD THEM MY MORNING ROUTINE? IT'S SO NORMAL TO ME, AND YET --

MARTA?



HI, JENNY -- WHAT'S UP?

LOOK, MARTA -- I WAS WONDERING --

-- ONE OF THE GALS IN MY APARTMENT JUST TOOK A JOB IN SAN FRANCISCO, SO WE'RE LOOKING FOR A NEW ROOMIE --

"-- IF YOU'RE INTERESTED."

NO.
DEFINITE
NOT!

BUT MAMA,
I --

THIS IS
WHAT COMES!
I TOLD YOU,
NICU!

WE SPEAK ENGLISH
IN THE HOUSE SO SHE
GROWS UP NOT BEING AN
OUTSIDER! AND WHAT
HAPPENS?

SHE BECOMES
ONE OF THEM! SHE
WORKS DOWN THERE,
NOW SHE LIVES
DOWN THERE --

MAMA --

-- DOES
SHE MARRY
DOWN THERE,
AND THEN WE
NEVER SEE HER
AGAIN?!

GHEORGH
VASILIU, HE
NEEDS HELP AT
HIS SHOP.

THIS IS TRUE, MARTA!
VASILIU NEEDS A PERSON
TO KEEP BOOKS -- AND
HIS BUTCHER SHOP
MAKES PLENTY
MONEY!

WHAT
DOES --

YOU ARE
GOOD WITH
NUMBERS --

-- AND
VASILIU, HE'S
SINGLE AND
NOT BAD-
LOOKING --

MAMA!

I CAN'T BLAME THEM
EITHER, I SUPPOSE. THE
HILL IS THEIR WORLD --

DOWNTOWN IS AS ALIEN
TO THEM AS THOUGHTS OF
WOLFSBANE ARE TO SHELLIE
IN THE OFFICE. AND IT'S NOT
THAT I DON'T LIKE IT HERE --

-- THIS IS MY HOME. THE
CROOKED, WINDING STREETS --
THE SMELL OF GARLIC AND
OF BREAD BAKING --
GRANDMAMA'S GRAVE --

-- OF COURSE, I WOULDN'T MIND AT ALL HAVING MORE THAN TWO T.V. STATIONS, AND ONLY ONE OF THEM MOSTLY CLEAR --

--ILLION-DOLLAR REFURBISHMENT OF OUR MOST FAMOUS LANDMARK!

AS ALL ASTRO CITIZENS KNOW, OUR GLEAMING SILVER SYMBOL IS MORE THAN AN ORNAMENT --

-- MORE THAN A MEMORIAL TO A HERO WHO GAVE HIS LIFE TO SAVE MILLIONS --

WE'RE NOT TRULY SO DIFFERENT, ARE WE?

FILE FOOTAGE

-- BUT A BEACON IN TIMES OF EMERGENCY --

-- ALERTING ASTRO CITY'S SUPERHUMAN CHAMPIONS TO ANY DANGER THAT THREATENS INNOCENTS --

WOLFSBANE, CRUCIFIXES, SIGNAL-BROOCHES, EMERGENCY BEACONS. THEY HAVE THEIR TALISMANS, AND WE HAVE OURS --

-- THE COLOR AND PATTERN OF THE RINGS TELL OUR HEROES THE LOCATION OF THE DANGER, AND CERTAIN OTHER --

-- WE JUST SHAPE THEM DIFFERENTLY, THAT'S ALL.

THAT'S NOT SO STRANGE. ANYWHERE YOU GROW UP, YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO BE SAFE.

I REMEMBER GRANDMAMA TEACHING ME ABOUT THE PROTECTIVE PROPERTIES OF THE PLANTS IN HER GARDEN --

MISTLETOE, CHILD. WILL PROTECT YOU FROM THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS, FOR HE NOT STAND ITS PURITY.

ALSO, GOOD IF NEED TO SPEAK TO GHOSTS, BUT THAT FOR LATER.

-- MAKING SURE I KNEW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF --



AND THE GROUND
CRACKS OPEN
AND I LEAP AS IT
GAPES HUNGRILY
BELOW ME --

-- AND THEN THE
SHADOWS REACH FOR
ME AND MY HEART
IS POUNDING --

-- AND I HEAR
THEM CALLING,
CALLING ME
TO SAFETY --

TO ME,
MARTA -- !

THIS
WAY -- IT'S
THIS
WAY!

WILL
YOU LISTEN
TO YOURSELF?!
COME ON!

-- BUT THEIR
VOICES JUMBLE
TOGETHER --

REMEMBER,
CHILD -- REMEMBER
WHAT YOU
KNOW --

-- AND I
CALL OUT FOR
HELP --

-- BUT IT'S NOT WINGED
VICTORY, IT'S MS.
CONROY -- AND SHE ONLY
SMILES AND GLIDES ON --

-- AND I RUN BUT I
CAN'T REACH HER
AND THE DARKNESS
IS COMING FOR ME --

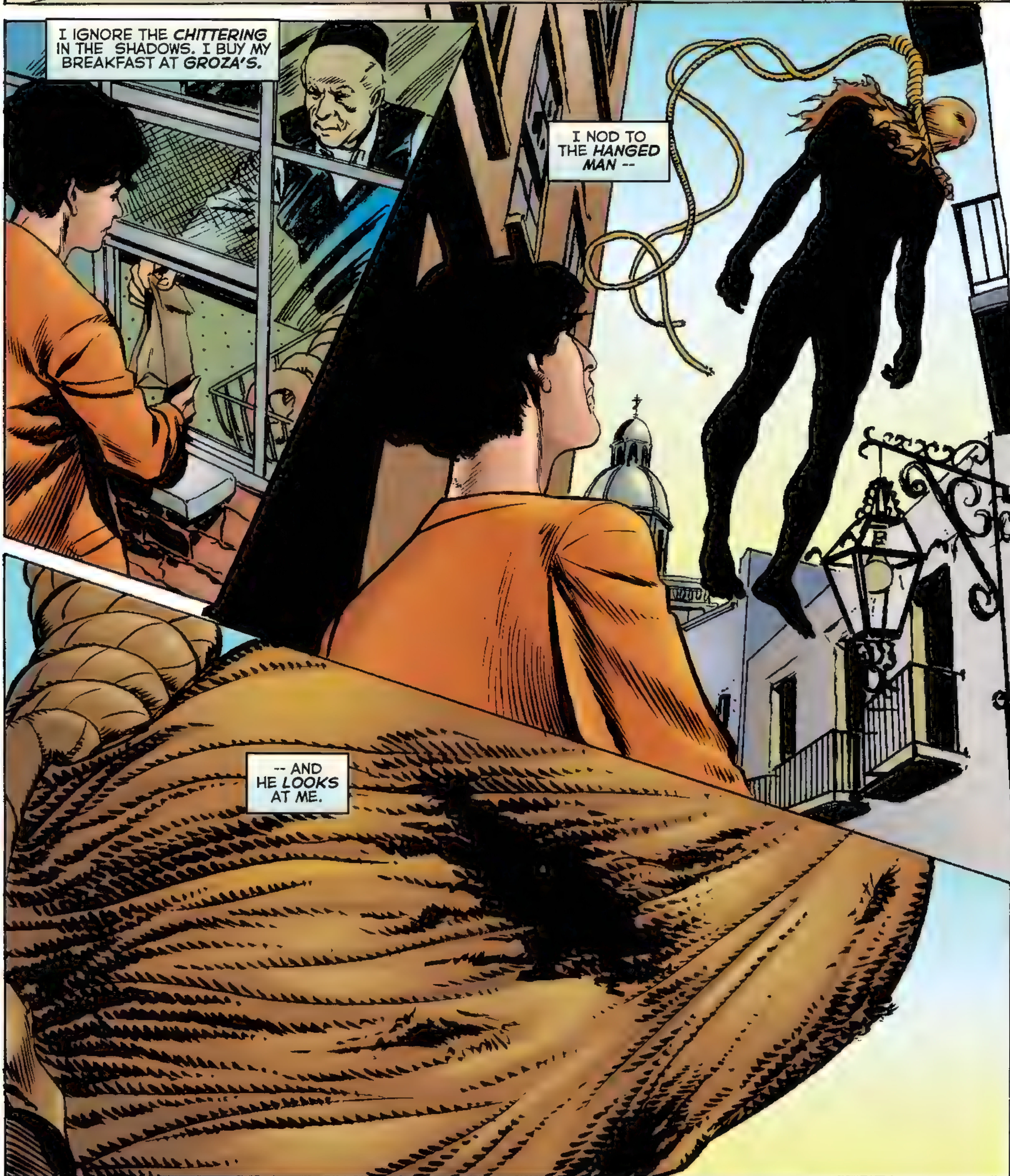
AND I WAKE UP TANGLED
IN THE SHEETS, MY BREATH
COMING IN RASPS AND MY
FACE COLD WITH SWEAT.

I FEEL LIKE THERE'S
SOMETHING OUTSIDE
THE WINDOW, PRESSING
ON IT. BUT WHEN I LOOK,
THERE'S NOTHING THERE.



THAT MORNING, I DO
MY ROUTINE, JUST AS
ON EVERY MORNING.

WINDOW-CATCHES,
CRUCIFIX, DOOR.
THE RUNE-PLATE IS
GETTING DULL, I
THINK TO MYSELF.
I'LL HAVE TO SHINE
IT UP TONIGHT.



I IGNORE THE CHITTERING
IN THE SHADOWS. I BUY MY
BREAKFAST AT GROZA'S.

I NOD TO
THE HANGED
MAN --

-- AND
HE LOOKS
AT ME.



HE LOOKS
AT ME!

I CAN'T SEE PAST
THE RAGGED EDGES
OF *BURLAP* THAT
HIDE HIS EYES, BUT
THERE'S SOMETHING
IN THOSE *DARK*
SMEARS --

-- AND I
KNOW IT'S A
WARNING --

-- BUT A WARNING
OF WHAT?

MORNING,
MARTA.

MARTA?

I RACK MY BRAIN,
BUT I'VE DONE
EVERYTHING --

-- THE LATCH CAUGHT,
THE WINDOWS ARE SAFE,
THE HEARTH DOESN'T
NEED RE-BLESSING FOR
ANOTHER MONTH --

-- I OWE,
I OWE, SO
OFF TO
WORK --

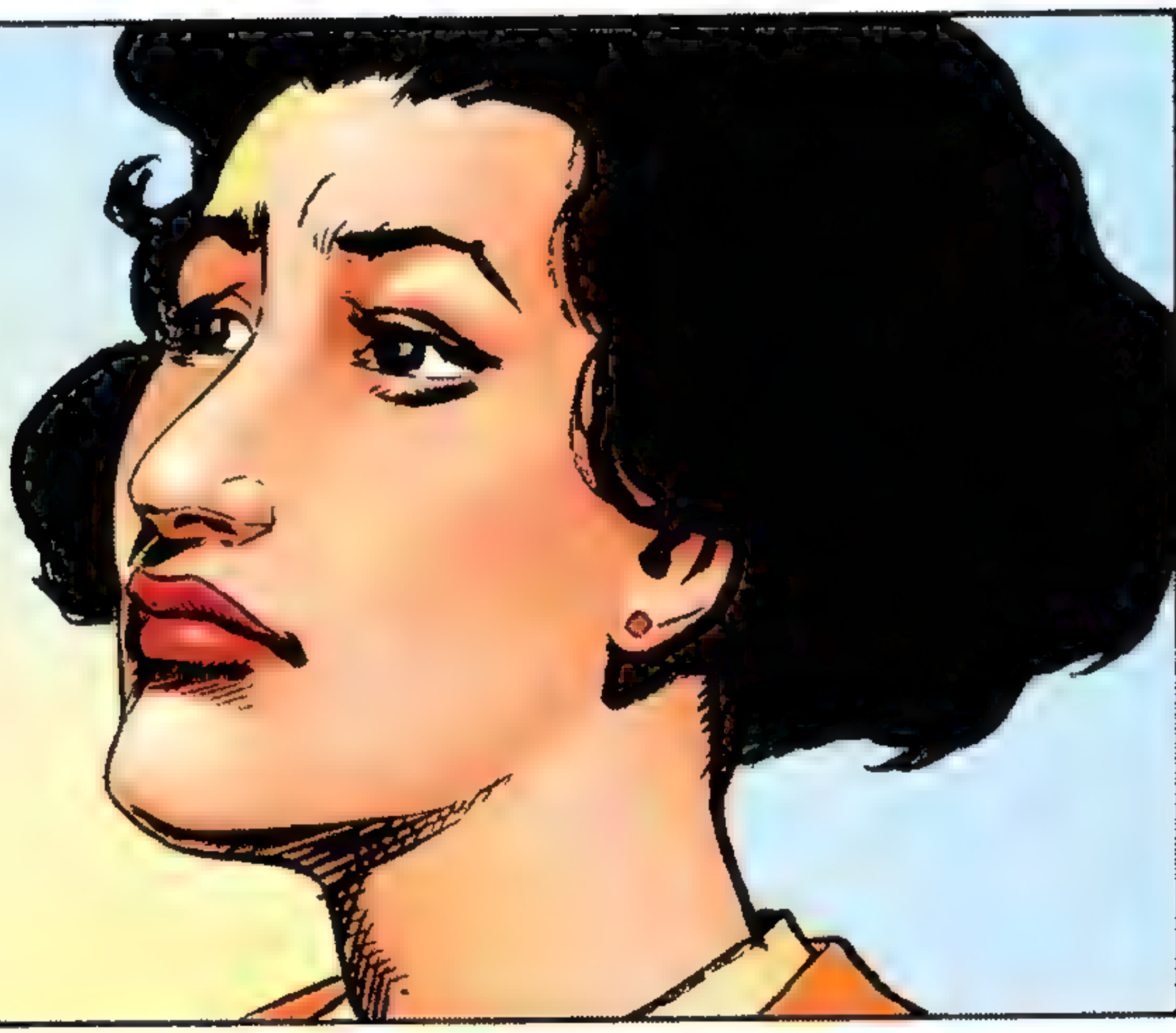
-- SPRANG
FLAMETHROWER
FROM LEAVENWORTH
LAST NIGHT -- THAT'S
THE *ENTIRE* UNHOLY
ALLIANCE --

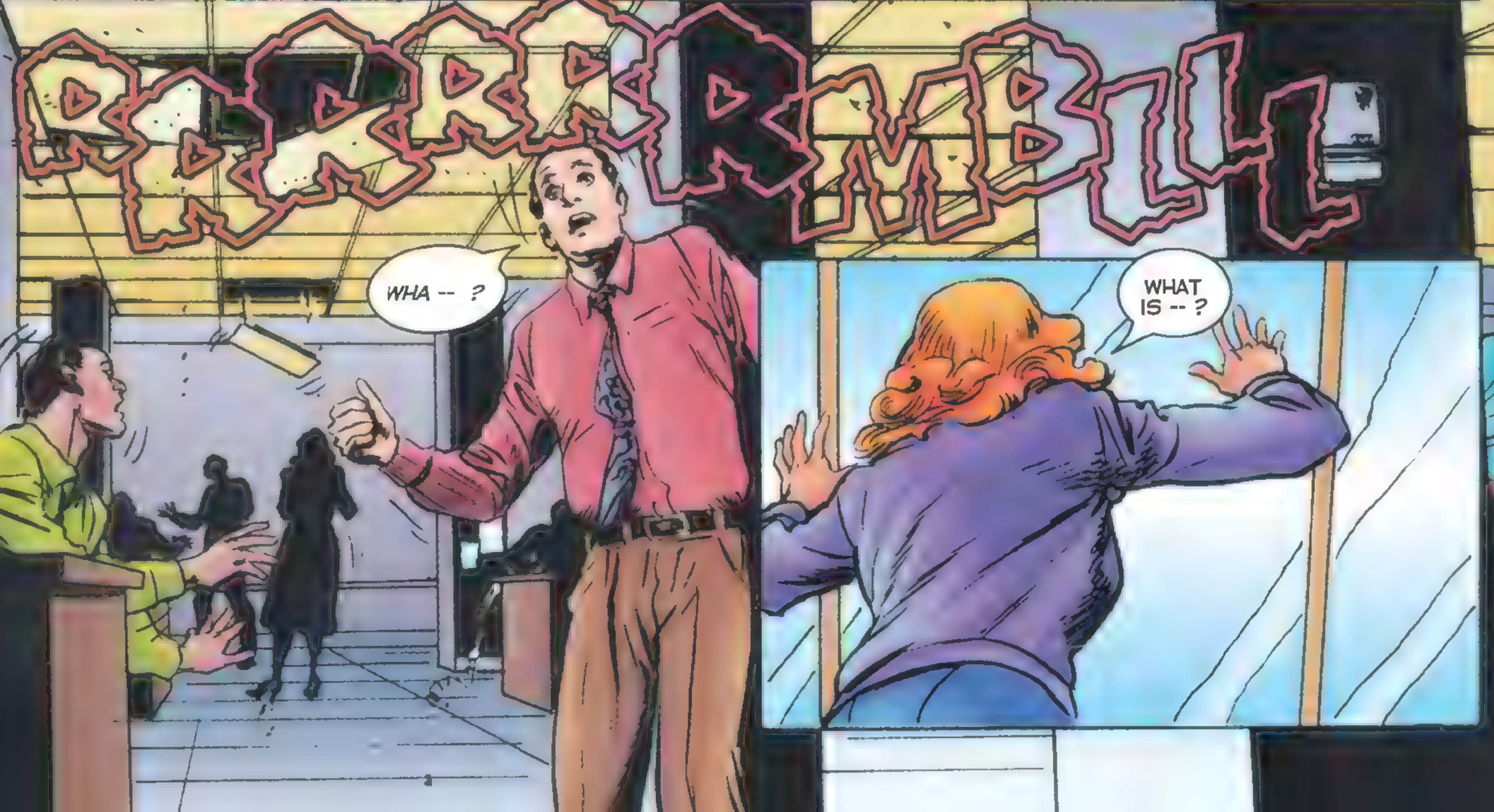
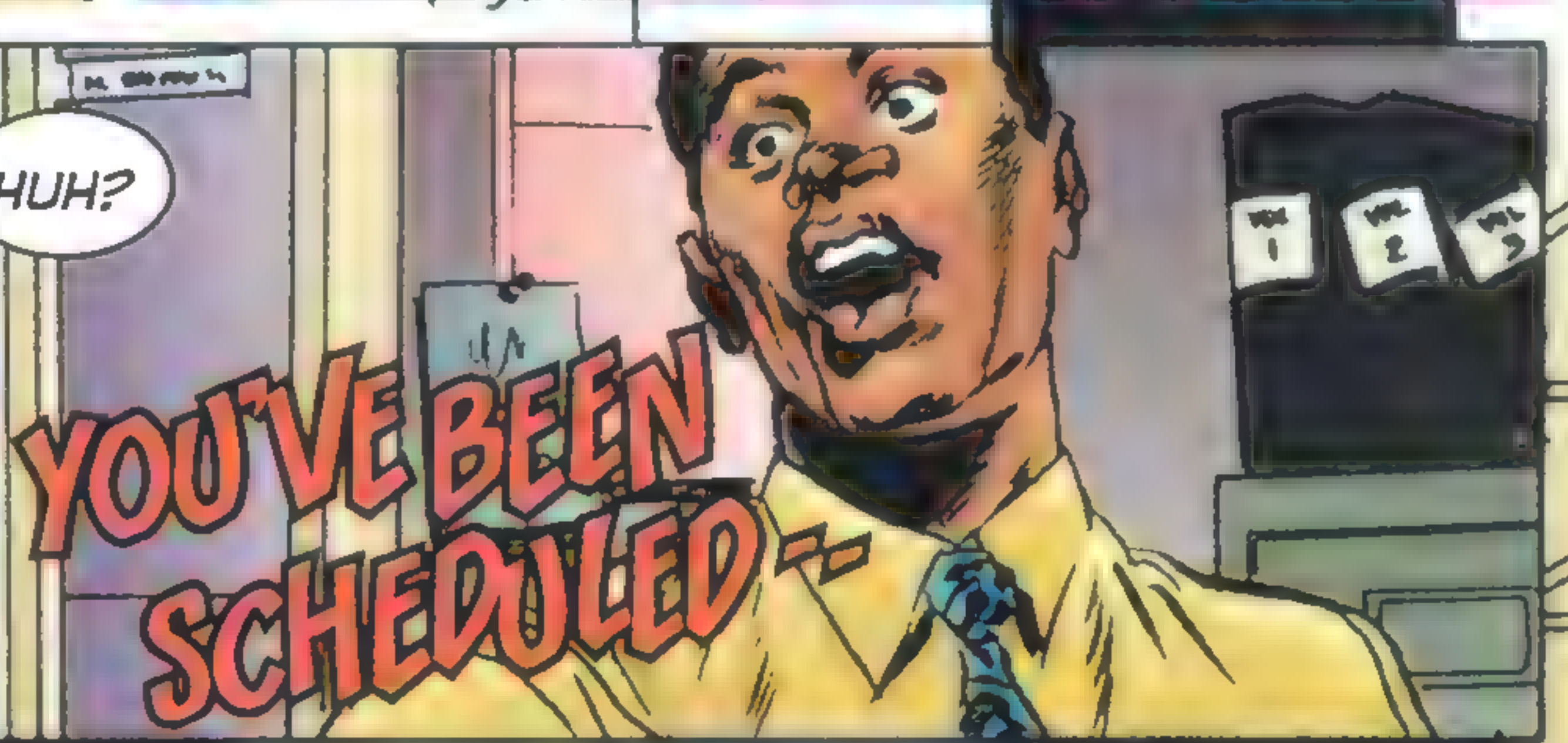
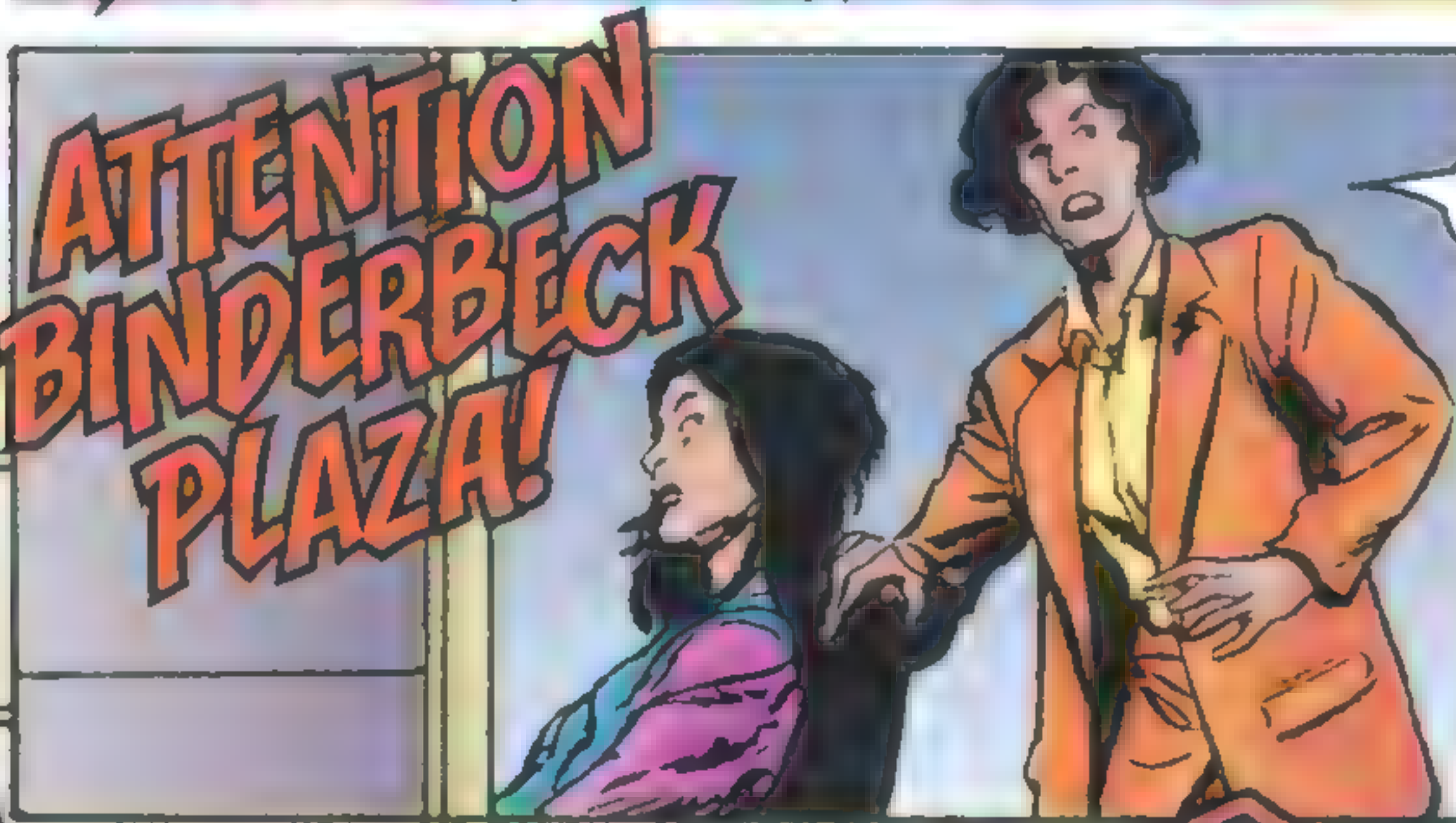
-- HONOR
GUARD'S ON THEIR
BUTTS -- CAUGHT
UP WITH THEM IN THE
QUAD CITIES --

-- CASH MONEY
SAMARITAN'LL
HAVE 'EM LOCKED
UP BY --

AND I THINK OF MY
DREAM, AND THE
CRACKING STREETS,
THE CLUTCHING
SHADOWS --

-- AND I DON'T WANT TO
BE A SCARED LITTLE
GIRL ANY MORE, BUT I
CAN FEEL THE BULK OF
THE *HILL* WEIGHING
DOWN ON ME, BURYING
ME ALIVE --







OH,
LORD.

**-- FOR
DEMOLITION!**

IT'S DEMOLITIA --
DEMOLITIA AND
THE UNHOLY
ALLIANCE.

THEY MUST
HAVE ELUDED
HONOR GUARD
IN IOWA. AND
NOW THEY'RE --

**AND WHEN
THE DUST SETTLES,
IF ANY OF YOU ARE
STILL STANDING --
DON'T SAY --**

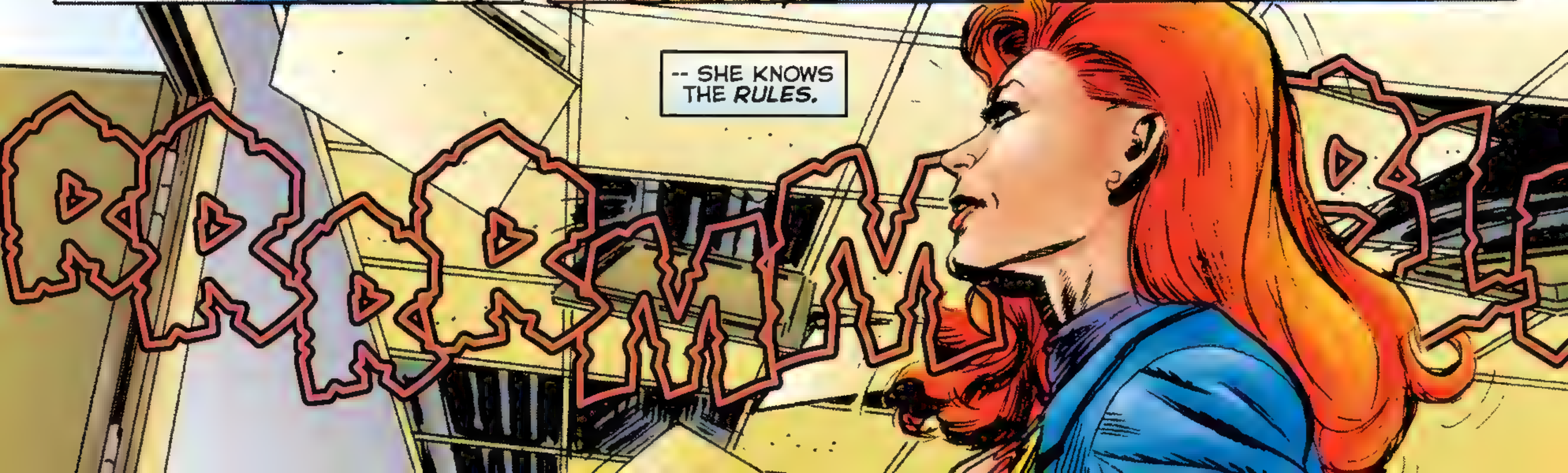
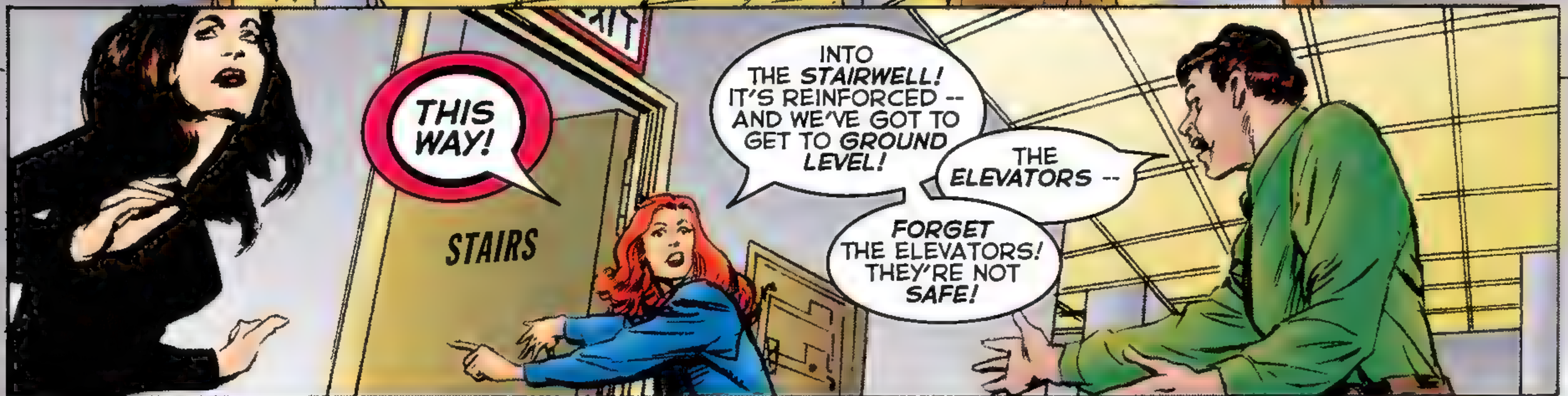
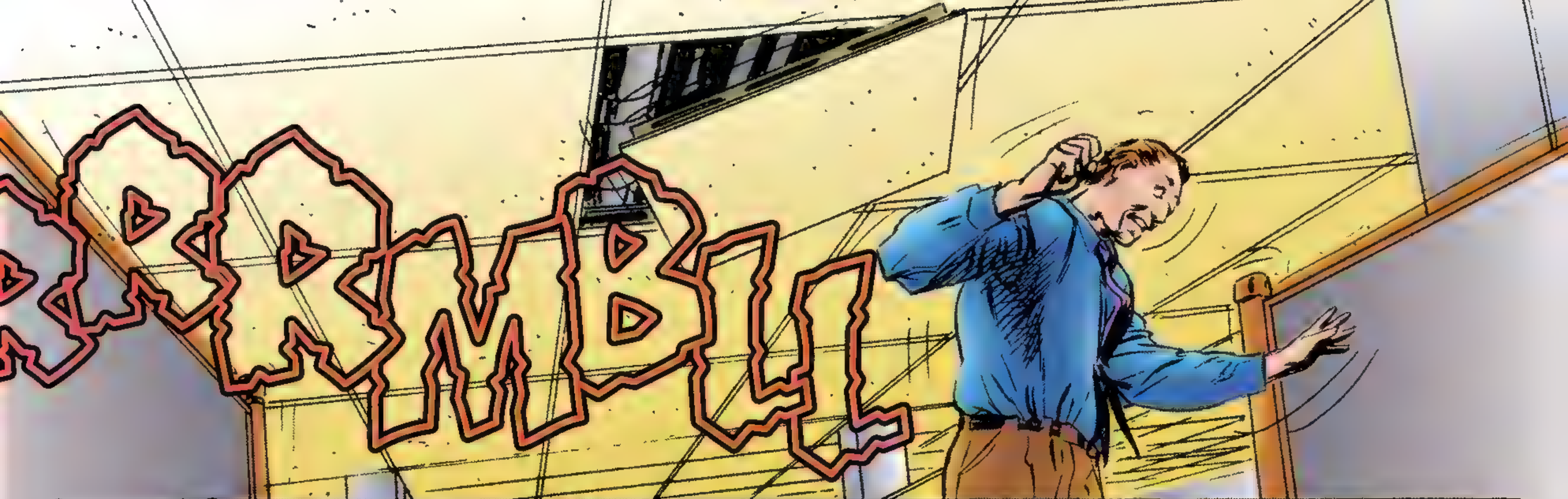
**-- YOU
WEREN'T
WARNED!**

-- NOW
THEY'RE
HERE.

WARNED?
BUT --

OH
GOD --

PLEASE KEEP
ASTRO CITY
CLEAN



WE NEVER DID
FIND OUT WHY
THEY ATTACKED.

IT MIGHT HAVE
BEEN DEMOLITIA
GOING AFTER MS.
CONROY, WHO'D
BEEN THE D.A. WHO
FIRST PUT HER IN
JAIL, YEARS BACK.

FLAMETHROWER!
OVER THERE!

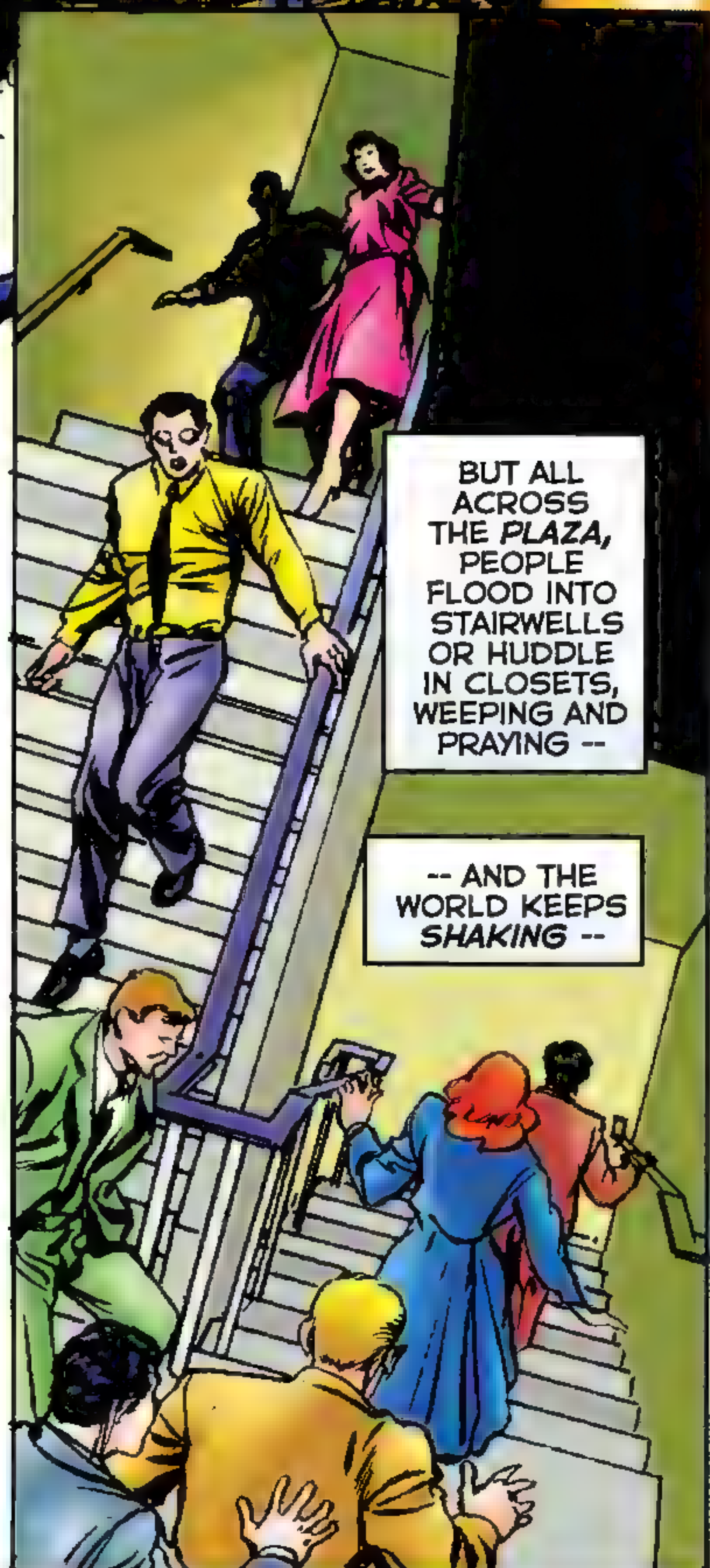
GOT
'EM!

GLOWWORM
BLAMED THE
CITY FOR THE
ACCIDENT THAT
TRANSFORMED
HIM --

SPICE CLAIMED THE
POLICE HAD MURDERED
HER EX-PARTNER,
SUGAR --

LEAVE THESE
PUBLIC SERVANTS
TO ME, SLAMBURGER --
AND BRING THOSE
BUILDINGS
DOWN!

OR MAYBE
SOMEBODY
PAID THEM.
WHO KNOWS?



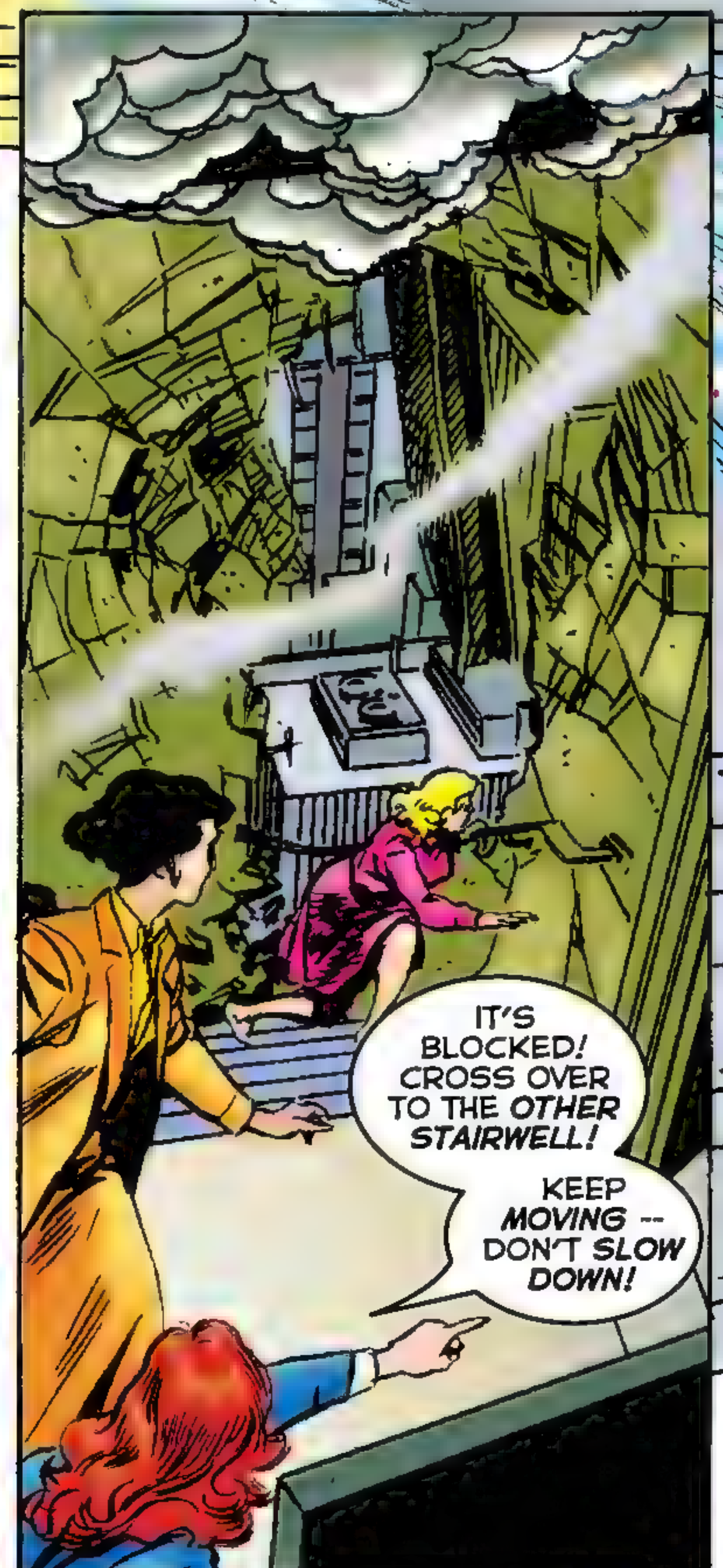
BUT ALL
ACROSS
THE PLAZA,
PEOPLE
FLOOD INTO
STAIRWELLS
OR HUDDLE
IN CLOSETS,
WEEPING AND
PRAYING --

-- AND THE
WORLD KEEPS
SHAKING --



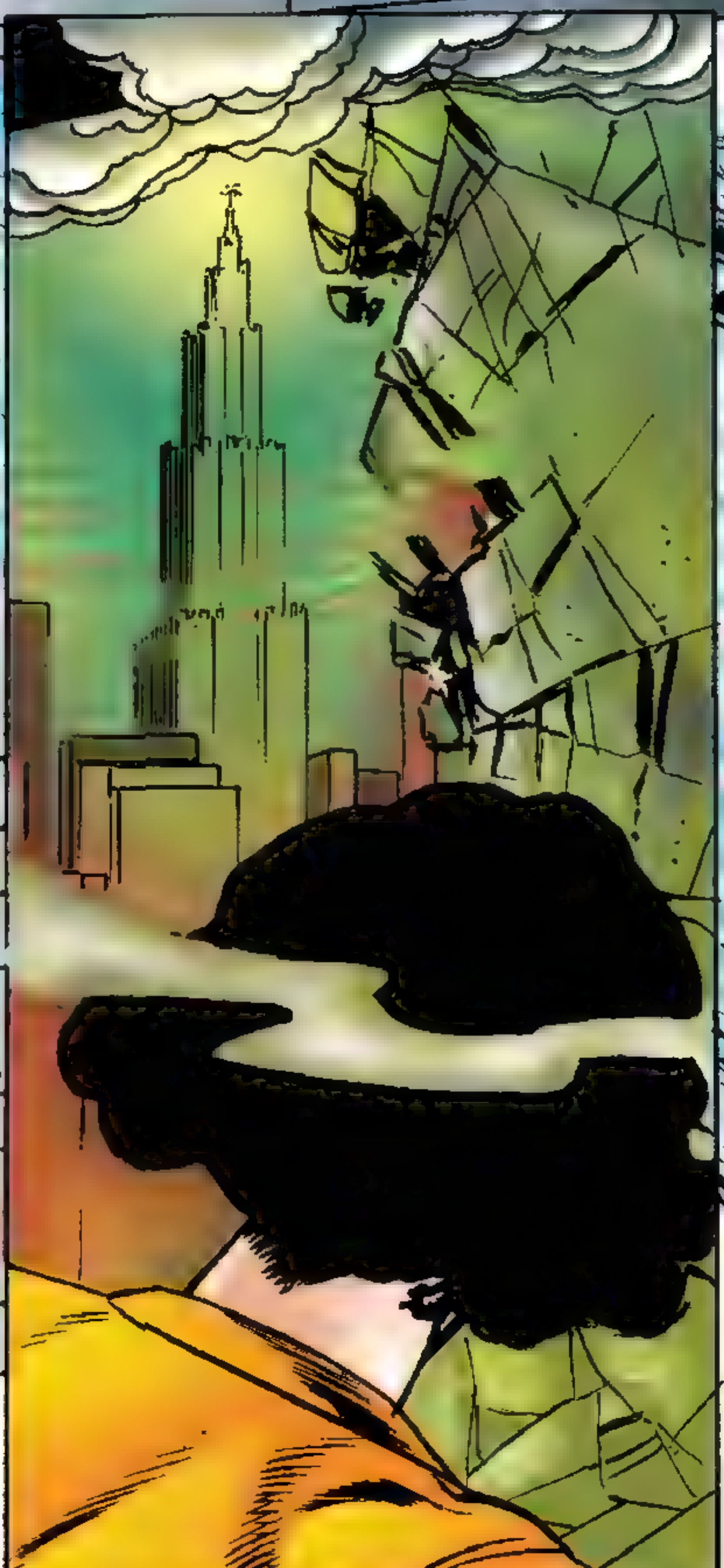
FRA
KAMM

AH -- !



IT'S
BLOCKED!
CROSS OVER
TO THE OTHER
STAIRWELL!

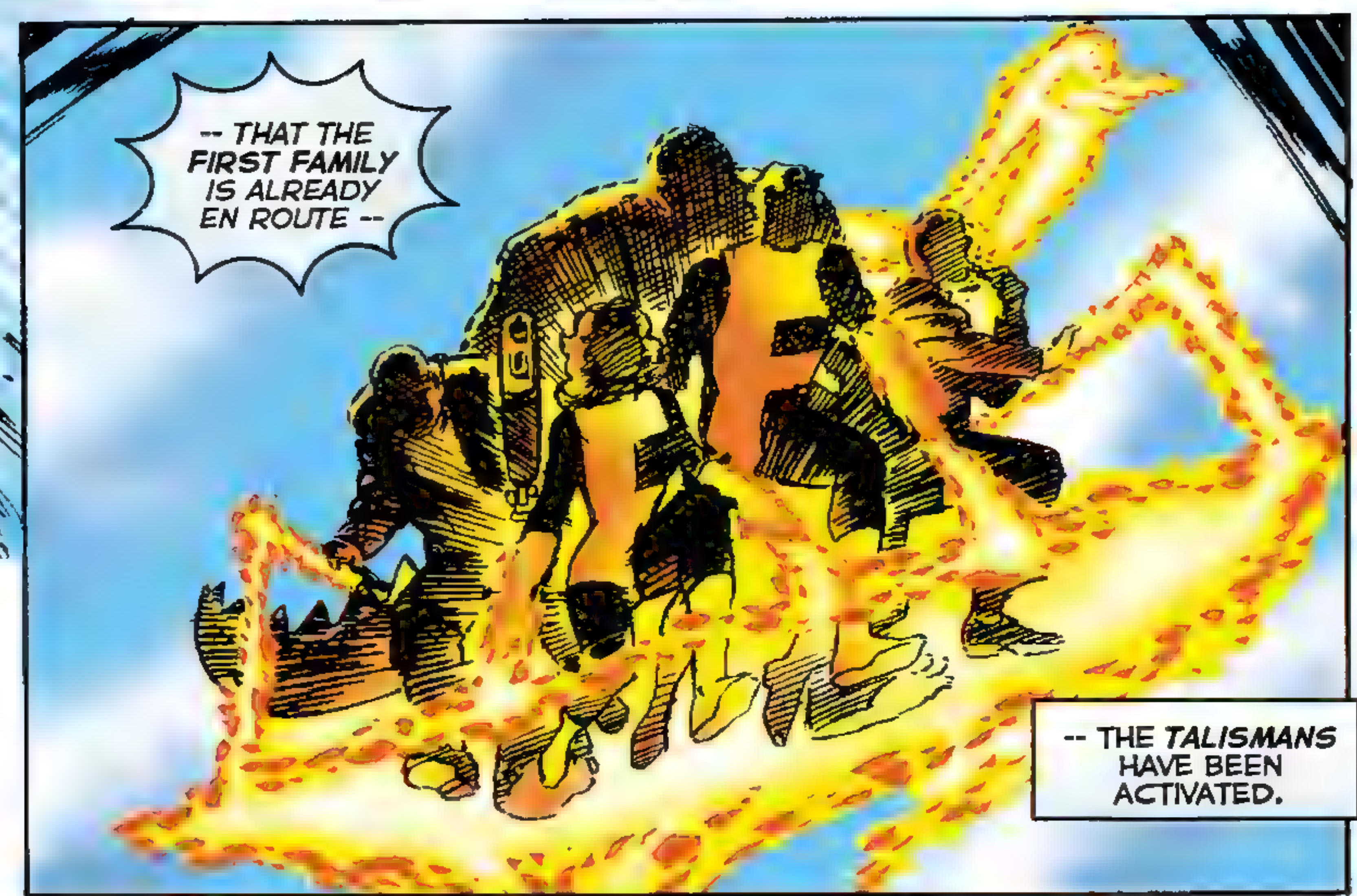
KEEP
MOVING --
DON'T SLOW
DOWN!



--URBANCE
AT BINDERBECK
PLAZA CONTINUES.
NEWS CAMERAS COULD
NOT REACH THE AREA,
DUE TO POLICE
BLOCKADES --

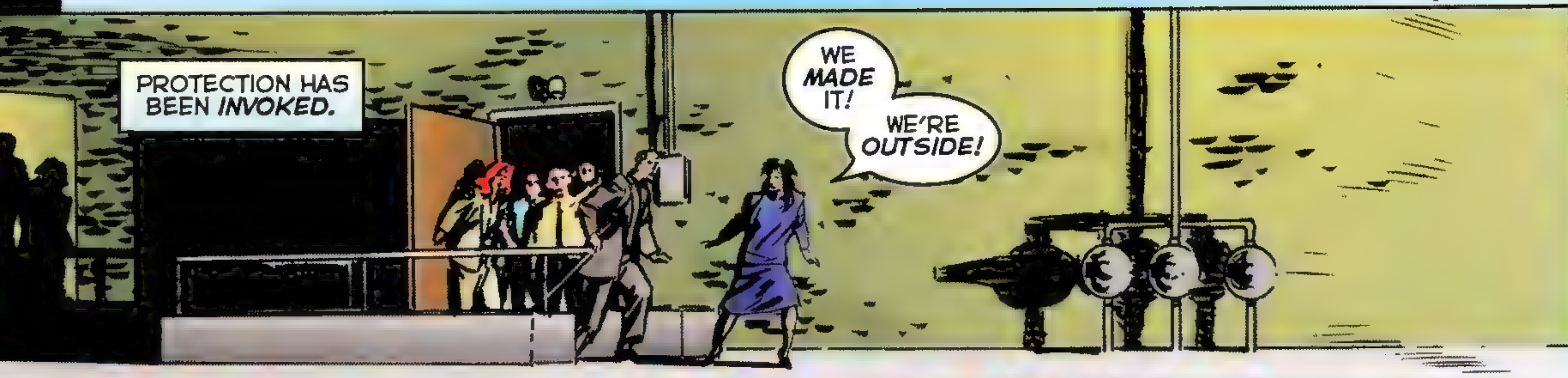
-- BUT
HELICOPTER
FOOTAGE
INDICATES --

IT'LL BE ALL RIGHT,
I TELL MYSELF.
IT HAS TO BE --



-- THAT THE
FIRST FAMILY
IS ALREADY
EN ROUTE --

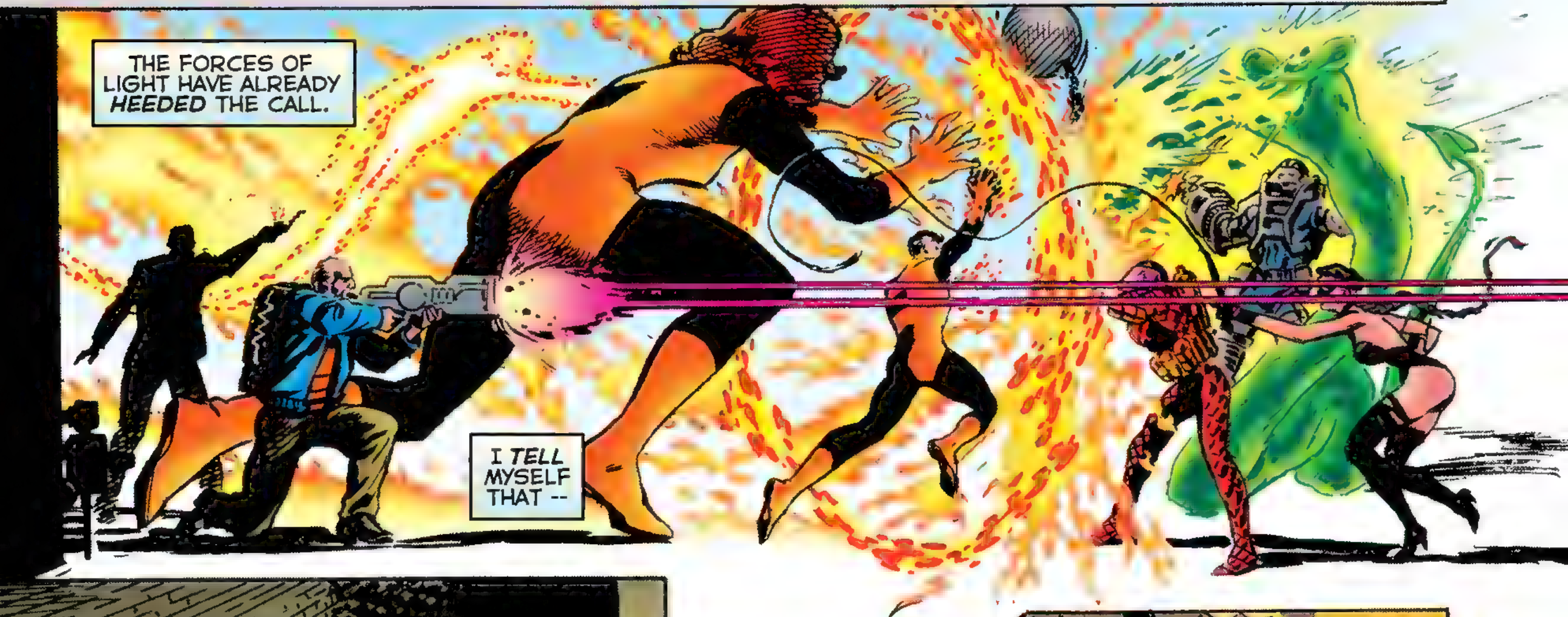
-- THE TALISMANS
HAVE BEEN
ACTIVATED.



PROTECTION HAS BEEN INVOKED.

WE MADE IT!

WE'RE OUTSIDE!



THE FORCES OF LIGHT HAVE ALREADY HEADED THE CALL.

I TELL MYSELF THAT --



-- I LET OUT THE BREATH I'VE BEEN HOLDING FOR THE LAST THREE FLOORS --

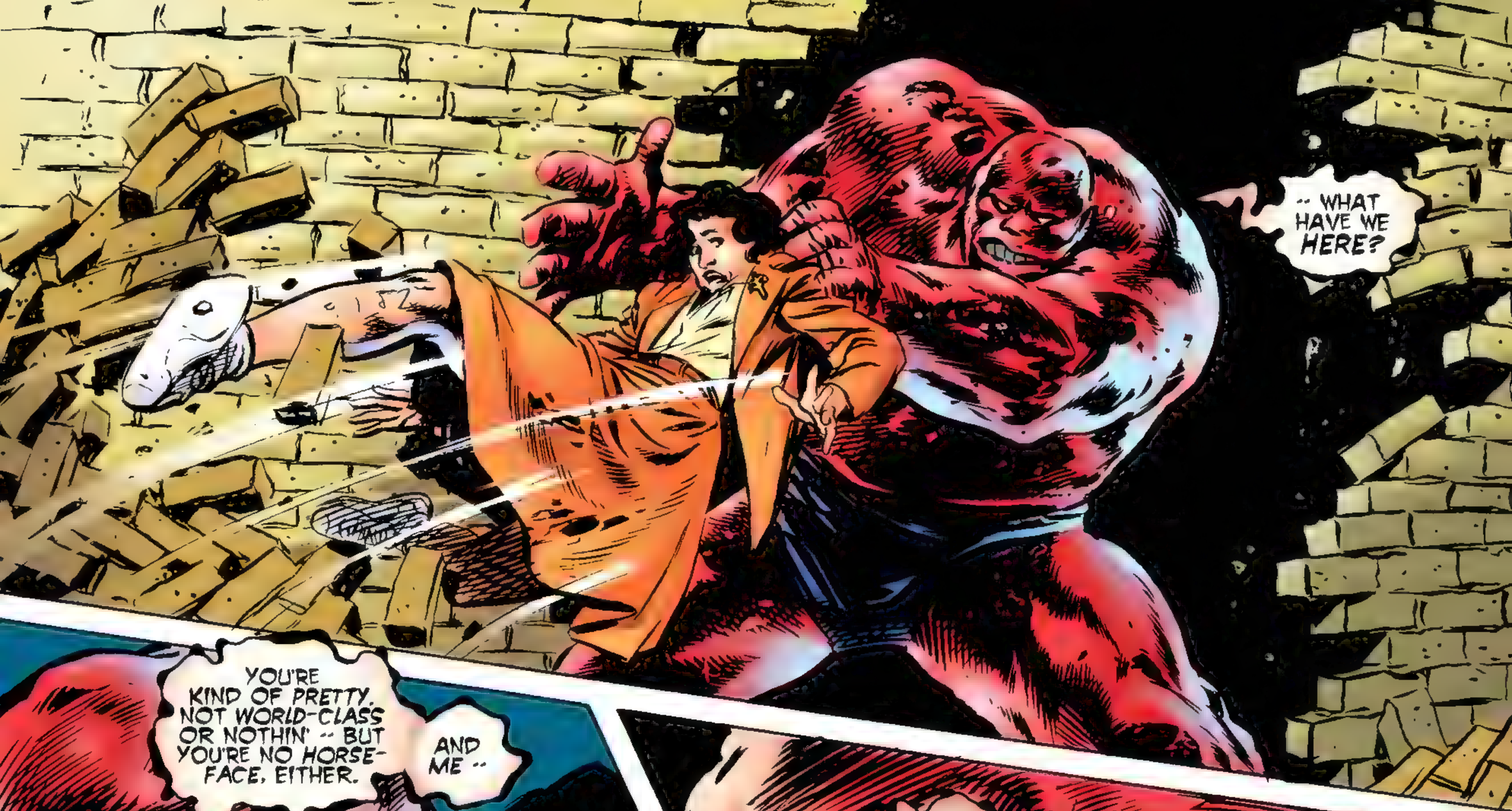
-- AND THAT'S WHEN IT HAPPENS. LIKE IT WAS WAITING FOR ME TO RELAX.

FRABRAMM

I'M HURT -- MY ARM, MY RIBS --

-- AND I'M CUT OFF FROM THE OTHERS --

WELL, WELL --



-- WHAT HAVE WE HERE?



YOU'RE KIND OF PRETTY, NOT WORLD-CLASS OR NOTHIN' -- BUT YOU'RE NO HORSE-FACE, EITHER.

AND ME --

-- I'VE BEEN IN JAIL FOR TWO YEARS --!

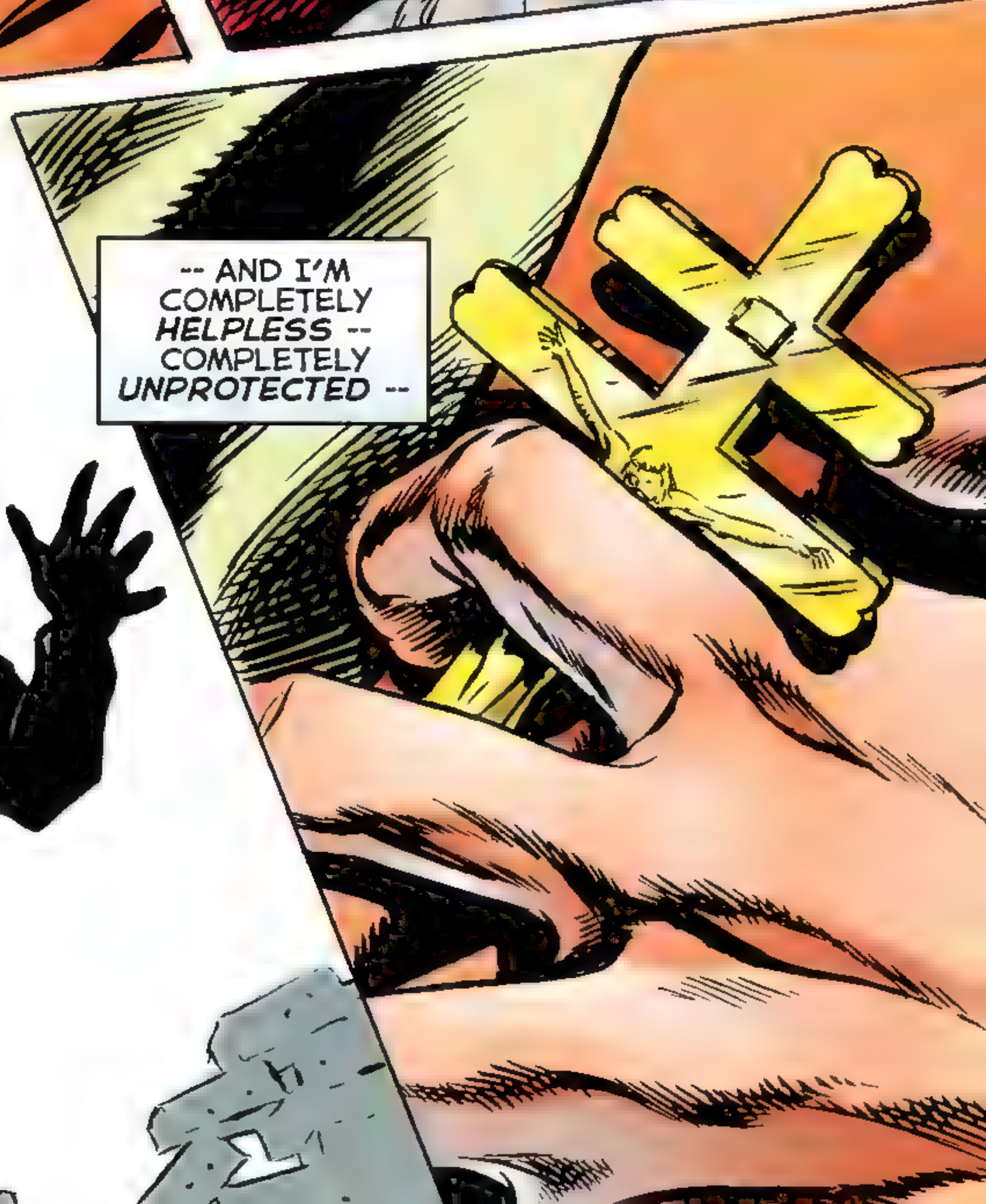
HIS BREATH IS HOT AND SULFUROUS -- AND SO CLOSE --

-- FILLING MY LUNGS -- MAKING MY EYES BURN --

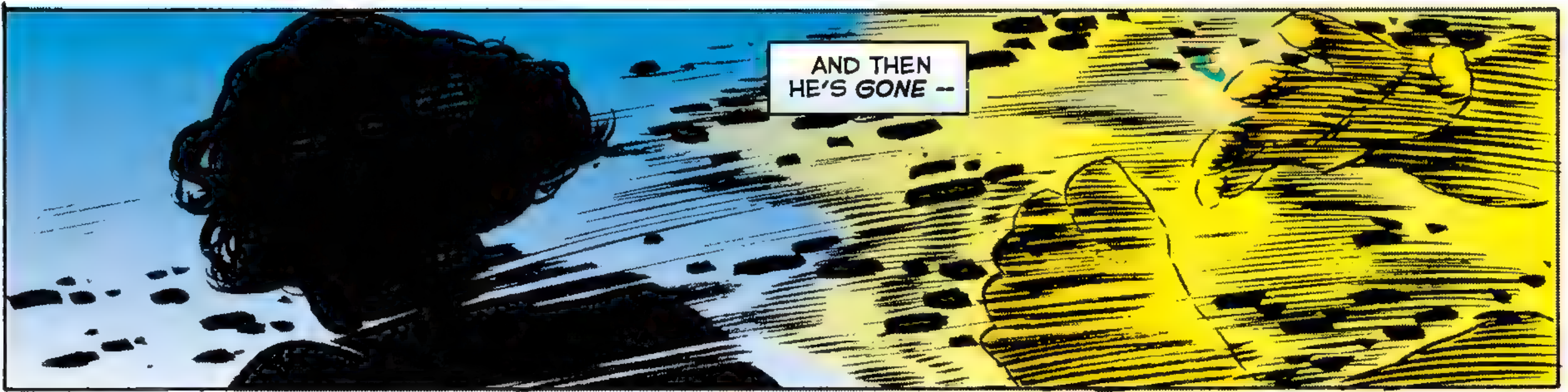


I THINK ABOUT GARLIC AND MISTLETOE AND AMARANTH --

-- BUT TO HIM -- TO THIS WORLD -- THEY'RE JUST PLANTS. ALL MY RITUALS -- ALL MY GRANDMAMA TAUGHT ME --



-- AND I'M COMPLETELY HELPLESS -- COMPLETELY UNPROTECTED --

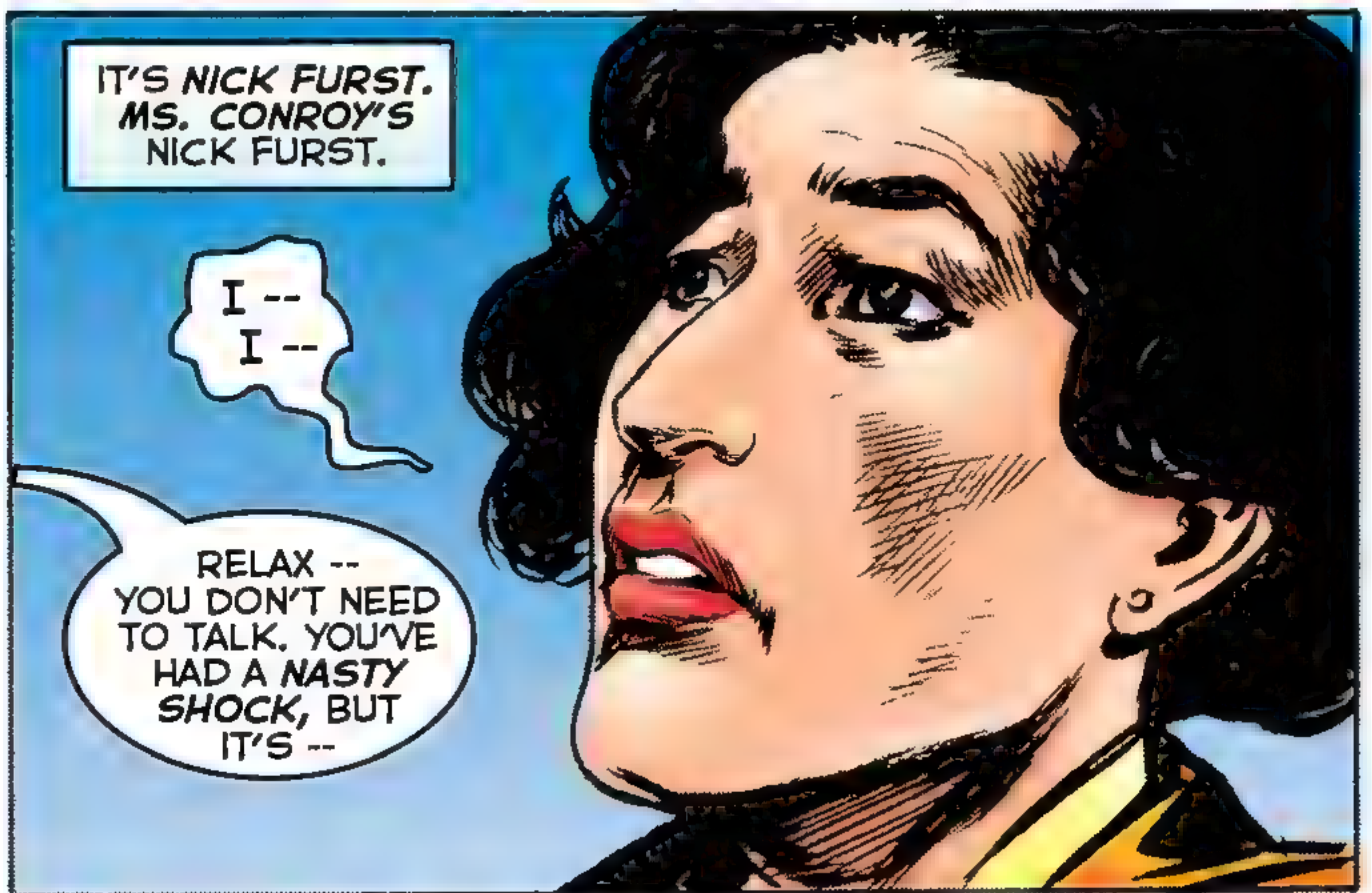


AND THEN
HE'S GONE --



-- AND THE AIR
IS SUDDENLY
SWEET AGAIN --

ARE
YOU ALL
RIGHT,
MISS?



IT'S NICK FURST.
MS. CONROY'S
NICK FURST.

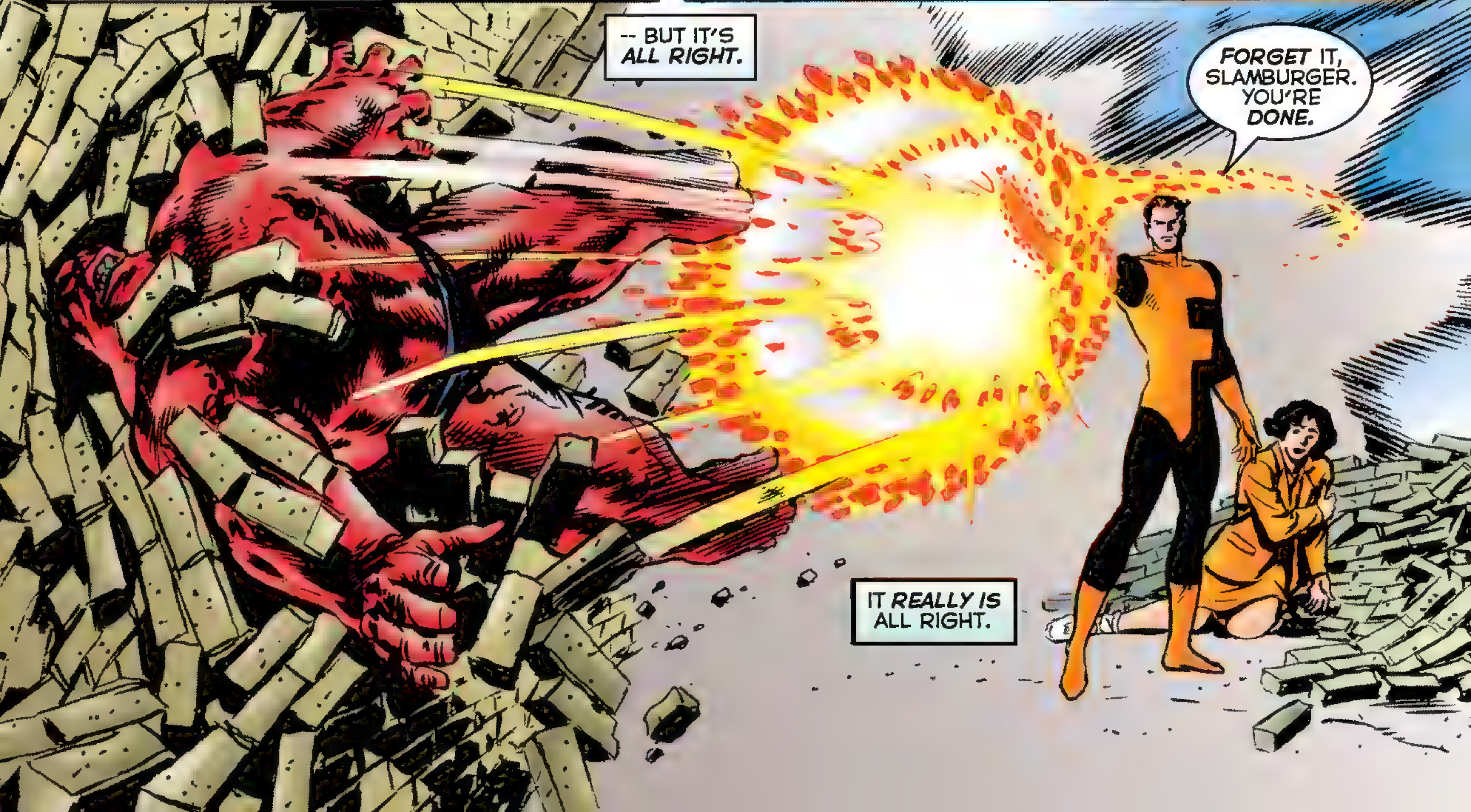
I --
I --

RELAX --
YOU DON'T NEED
TO TALK. YOU'VE
HAD A NASTY
SHOCK, BUT
IT'S --



KILL YOU
I'LL KILL YOU
I'LL

AND ALL I CAN
DO IS TRY TO POINT
AND MOUTH WORDS
THAT WON'T COME --



-- BUT IT'S
ALL RIGHT.

FORGET IT,
SLAMBURGER.
YOU'RE
DONE.

IT REALLY IS
ALL RIGHT.

THE REST
WAS ALL IN
THE PAPERS.

THE FIRST FAMILY'S SWIFT
ARRIVAL CONTAINED THE
DAMAGE, SO THAT BINDERBECK
PLAZA WOULD ONLY HAVE TO
BE REPAIRED, NOT REBUILT --

AND THE UNHOLY
ALLIANCE WAS
CAPTURED --

-- WASTING
YOUR TIME,
GLOWWORM!

HUH? MY
FLAME -- !

-- ALL BUT **FLAMETHROWER**,
WHO ESCAPED FROM THE
POLICE WHILE BEING
TAKEN INTO CUSTODY.

DON'T
EVEN BAT
AN EYELASH,
KIDDO. I MAY
BE OLD ENOUGH
TO BE YER
GRAMPAW --

-- BUT
I GOT THE
DROP ON
YA -- !

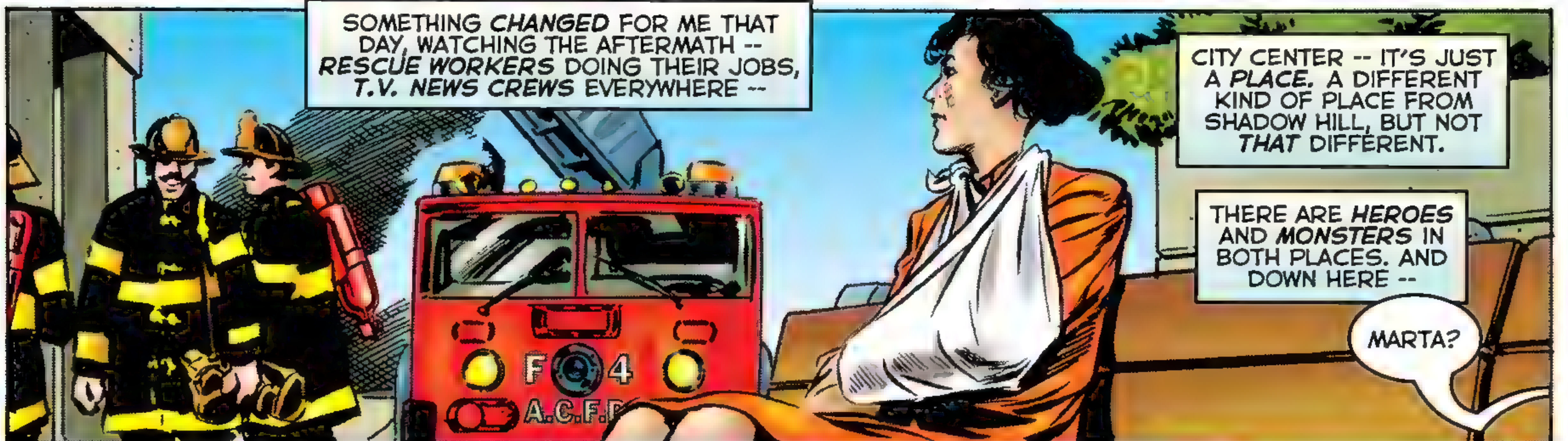
THE PAPERS DIDN'T
MENTION HOW NICK
FURST TOOK ME TO
A FIELD HOSPITAL
PERSONALLY, OF
COURSE --

-- OR HOW HE HAD
CROW'S FEET AROUND
HIS EYES AND AN OLD
SCAR ON HIS CHIN, JUST
LIKE A REAL PERSON.
A REAL PERSON --

-- NOT JUST A NAME IN THE
NEWS AND A SMILE GLIMPSED
OVER SOME PEOPLE'S HEADS
AT THE OFFICE ONE DAY --



AND IF HE WAS A
REAL PERSON, THEN
THE OTHERS...



SOMETHING CHANGED FOR ME THAT
DAY, WATCHING THE AFTERMATH --
RESCUE WORKERS DOING THEIR JOBS,
T.V. NEWS CREWS EVERYWHERE --

CITY CENTER -- IT'S JUST
A PLACE, A DIFFERENT
KIND OF PLACE FROM
SHADOW HILL, BUT NOT
THAT DIFFERENT.

THERE ARE **HEROES**
AND **MONSTERS** IN
BOTH PLACES. AND
DOWN HERE --

MARTA?



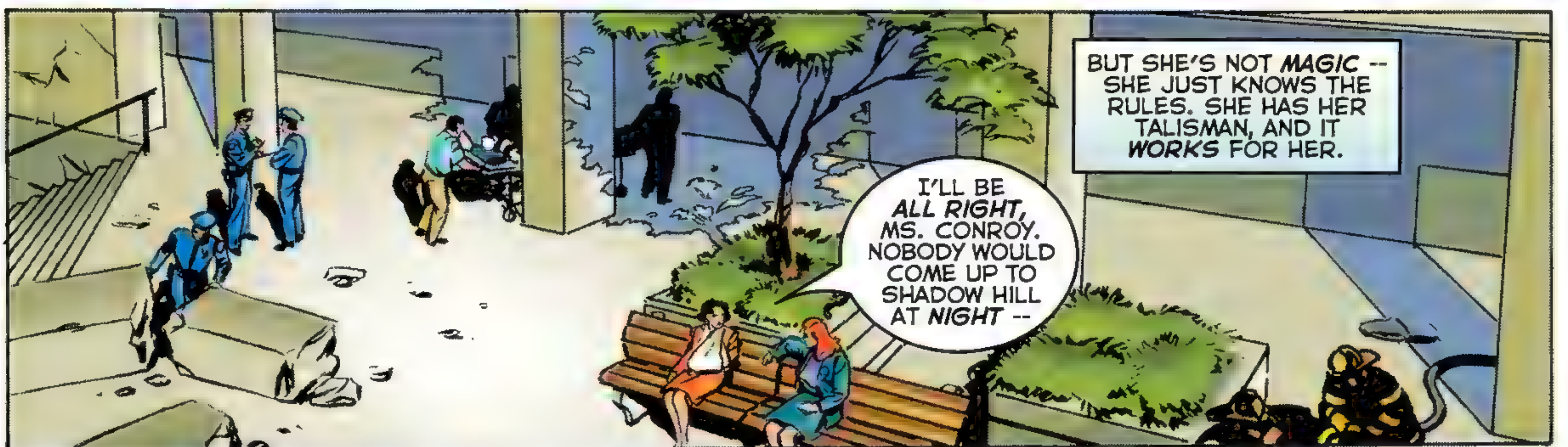
-- THERE ARE
RULES DOWN
HERE, TOO.

MS.
CONROY!

IF YOU DON'T WANT TO
GO HOME TONIGHT -- IF
YOU'RE SCARED BECAUSE
FLAMETHROWER'S
STILL ON THE
LOOSE --

-- I CAN
PUT YOU UP
AT MY PLACE.

MS. CONROY IS
A GOOD PERSON.
KIND, AND SMART,
AND BRAVE.



BUT SHE'S NOT **MAGIC** --
SHE JUST KNOWS THE
RULES. SHE HAS HER
TALISMAN, AND IT
WORKS FOR HER.

I'LL BE
ALL RIGHT,
MS. CONROY.
NOBODY WOULD
COME UP TO
SHADOW HILL
AT NIGHT --



-- NOT IF
THEY DON'T
KNOW HOW TO
TAKE CARE OF
THEMSELVES.

BUT IT'S HER
TALISMAN.
THAT'S THE REAL
DIFFERENCE.



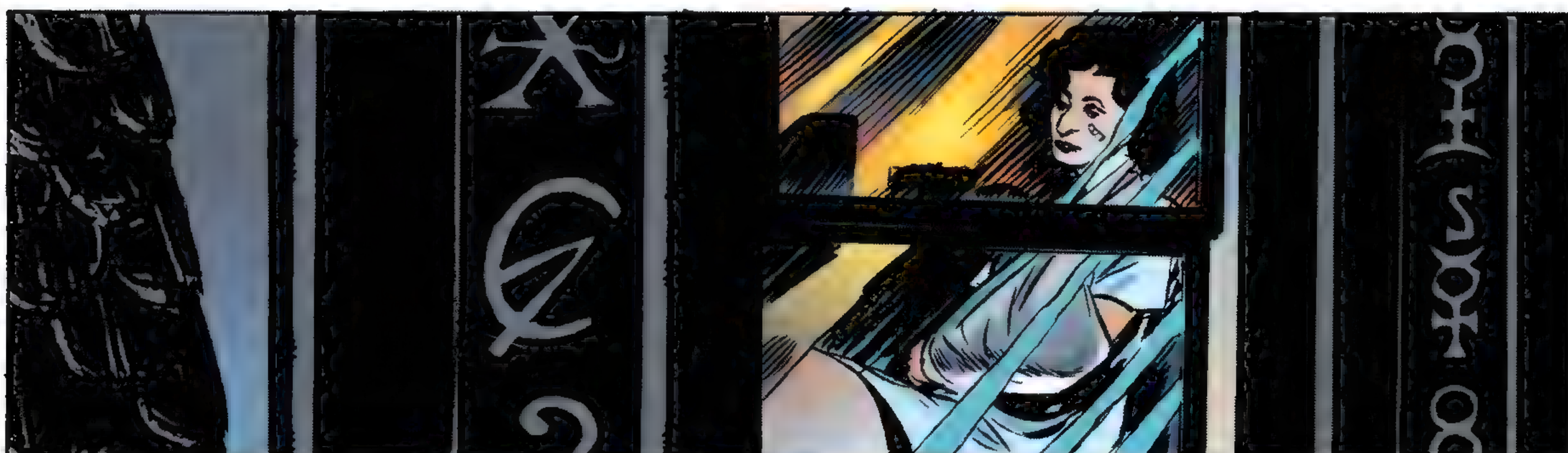
I'M SAFE HERE. THERE ARE UNTHINKABLE DANGERS SWIRLING IN THE SHADOWS OUTSIDE MY WINDOW, BUT THEY'RE MY PROTECTION.

THEY'RE MY SHIELD AGAINST THE DANGERS I DON'T UNDERSTAND.



I SIT AND THINK ABOUT CHARMS AND TALISMANS. MS. CONROY HAS A TALISMAN. THE CITY HAS A TALISMAN.

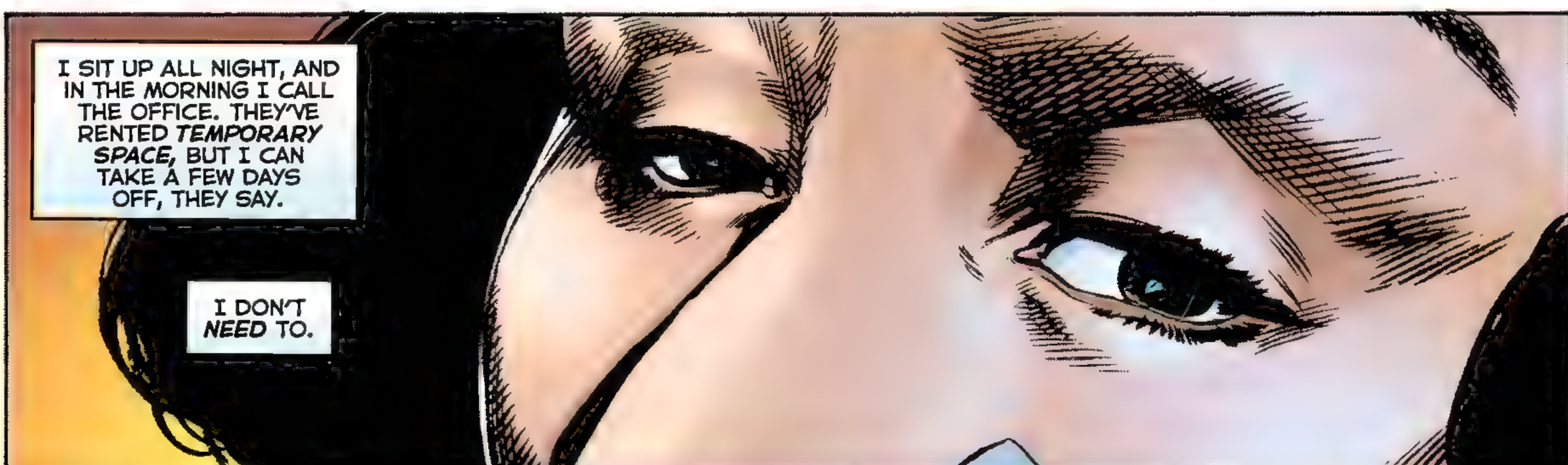
WHAT DO I HAVE?



I WAS SO SCARED. I WANTED TO BE ANYWHERE BUT HERE -- I WANTED TO GET OUT, TO GO -- TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE.

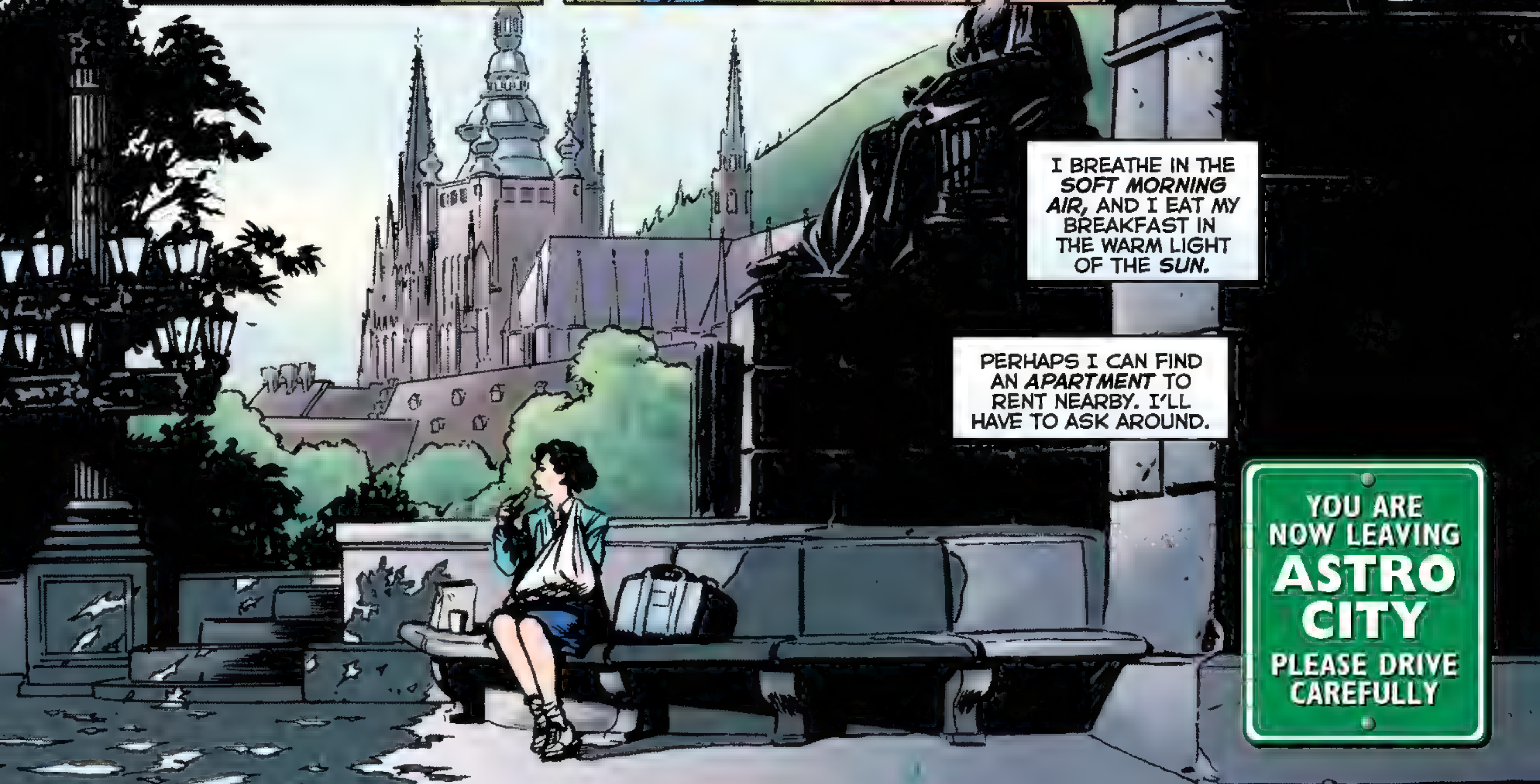
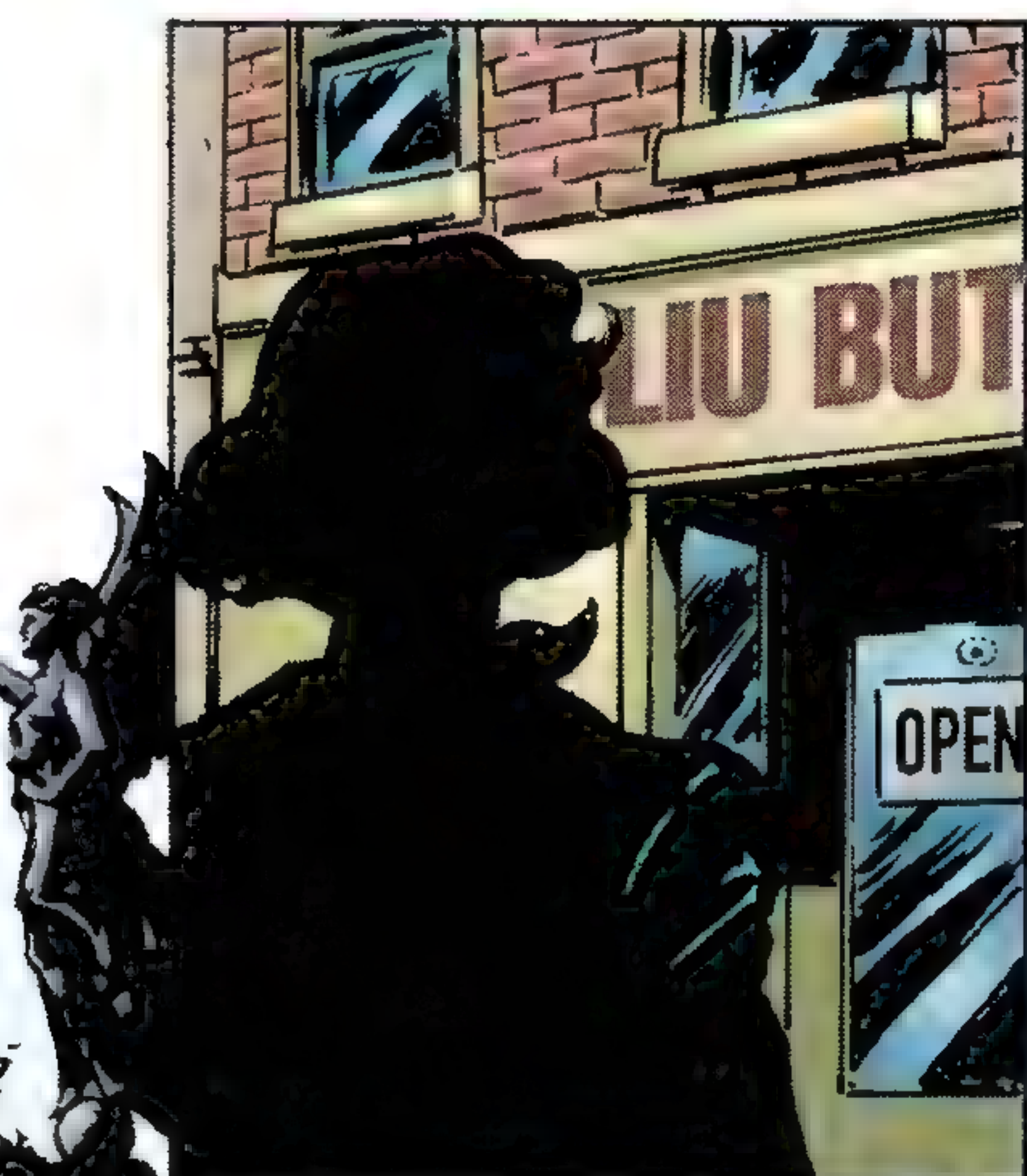
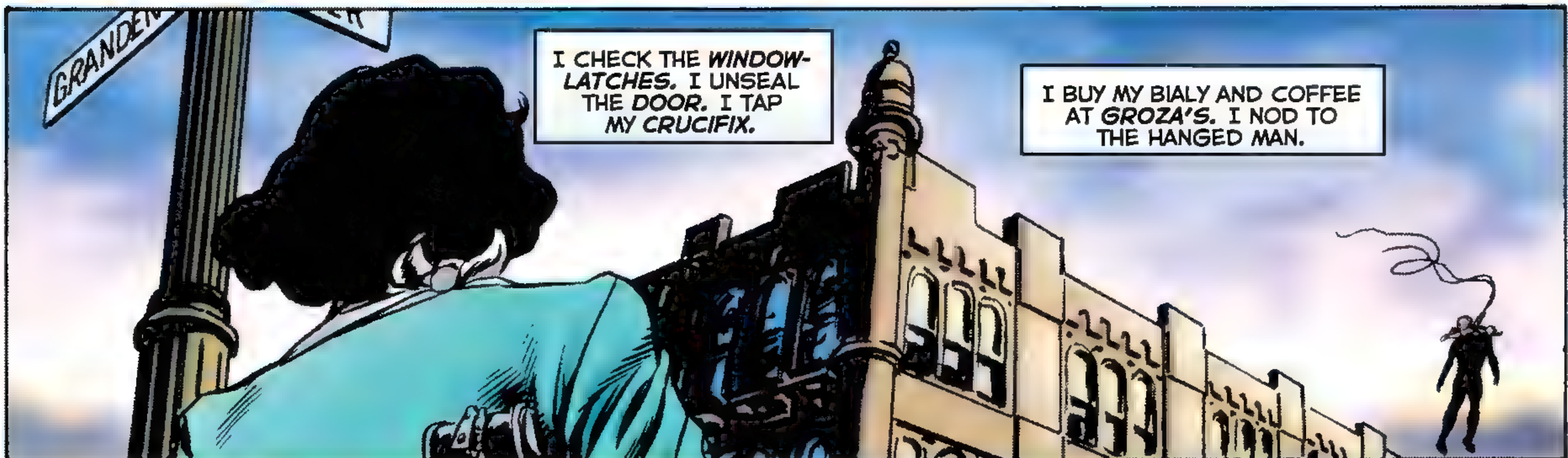
AND I SIT, AND I WATCH THE SHAPES IN THE MIST, AND I WONDER.

WAS IT REALLY THE HILL THAT SCARED ME?



I SIT UP ALL NIGHT, AND IN THE MORNING I CALL THE OFFICE. THEY'VE RENTED TEMPORARY SPACE, BUT I CAN TAKE A FEW DAYS OFF, THEY SAY.

I DON'T NEED TO.





5



Once upon a time...

...there was a little old man who lived in an undistinguished rooming house on the north side of Astro City.

If you asked him, the little old man would say that he worked forty-five years as a draftsman in a basement room without windows, and he intended to spend his retirement out-of-doors as much as possible, breathing the air, looking at the sun and sky until he finally managed to flush the fluorescent light from his system.

But the little old man was a liar.

There was no basement room. There was no fluorescent light.

And he did not walk outside to look at the sun.



REGORRAHISSTAGE

I WATCH
THEM
FIGHT.

THE ONE IS A BEING
OF MECHANICS, EARTH
AND STONE, A CREATION
OF THE SCAVENGER
PEOPLES WHO LIVE
BELOW THE SURFACE
OF THE EARTH.

COME
ON, ROBO --
BREAK
AWAY!

CAN'T!
CAUGH IN SOME
SORT OF MAGNETIC
FIELD -- SCREWING
UP MY SERVOS!

YOU AN'
ME, 'ROACH --
WE'LL TAKE HIM
APART FROM
THE KNEES
UP!

FOR THE
LAST TIME,
JAILBAIT --

-- MY
NAME IS
PALMETTO!

-- BUT --

HEEEERE
I COME TO
SAVE THE
DAAAA!

THE OTHERS ARE THE
ASTRO CITY IRREGULARS --
A MOTLEY ASSEMBLAGE
OF YOUNG CASTOFFS AND
REJECTS, UNWANTED BY
THE REST OF THE CITY'S
SUPERHERO COMMUNITY.

THEY SEEM BONDED
BY THEIR ANGER AS
MUCH AS TEAMWORK,
FIGHTING TO PROVE
THEIR WORTH TO
THEMSELVES EVEN
AS THEY SAVE LIVES.

THEY ARE OUTMATCHED,
BUT I HAVE NO DOUBT
THAT THEY WILL PROVE
VICTORIOUS. I DO
NOT YET KNOW HOW --

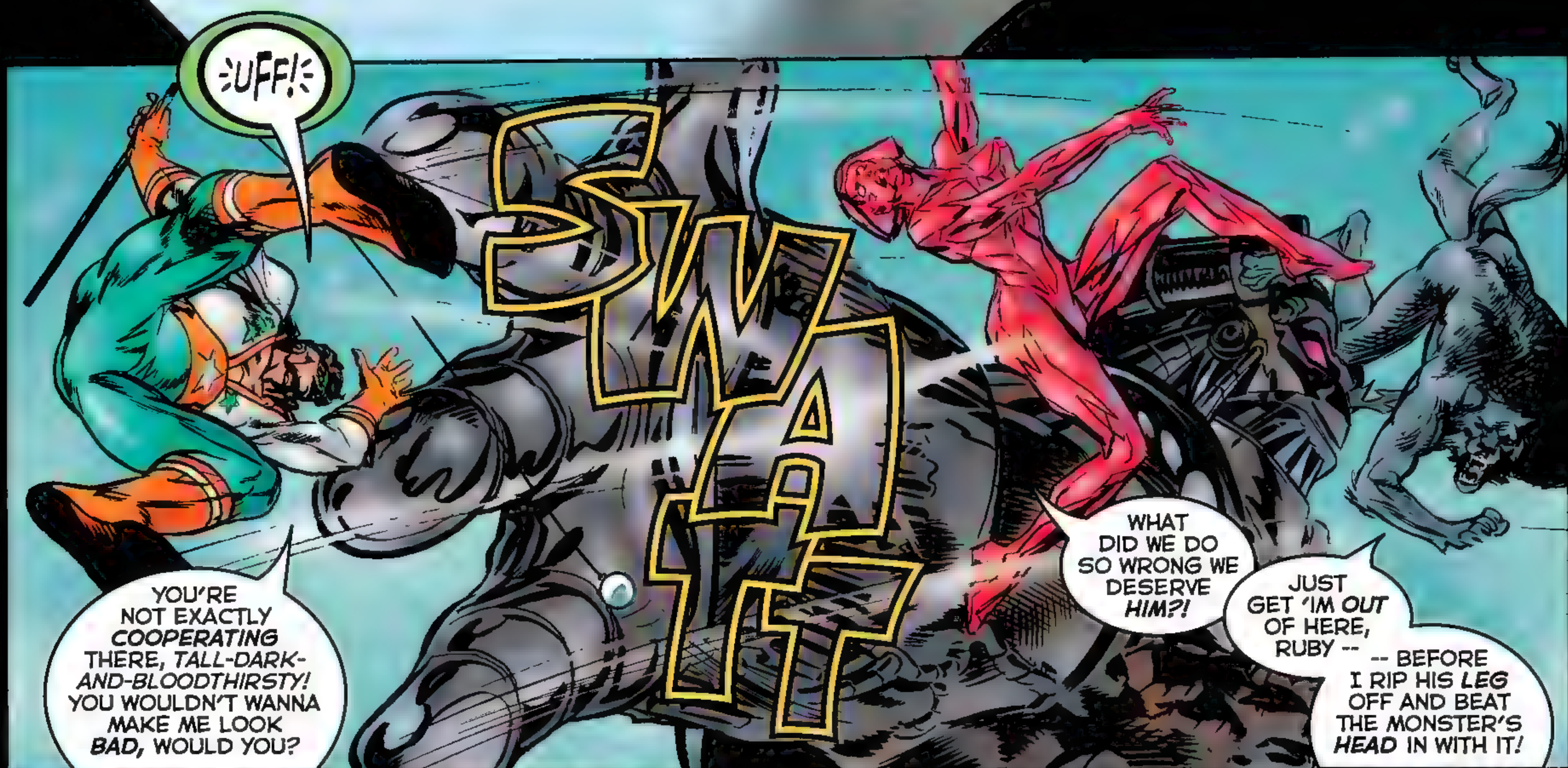




NO NEED
TO APPLAUD,
KIDDIES AND
KIDETTES!

JUST
SIT BACK AND
WATCH, WHILE A
PROFESSIONAL
DEMONSTRATES
THE FINE ART
OF MONSTER-
TAMING!

AI DE MI!
CRACKERJACK!



UFF!

YOU'RE
NOT EXACTLY
COOPERATING
THERE, TALL-DARK-
AND-BLOODTHIRSTY!
YOU WOULDN'T WANNA
MAKE ME LOOK
BAD, WOULD YOU?

WHAT
DID WE DO
SO WRONG WE
DESERVE
HIM?!

JUST
GET 'IM OUT
OF HERE,
RUBY --

-- BEFORE
I RIP HIS LEG
OFF AND BEAT
THE MONSTER'S
HEAD IN WITH IT!



THE NEW-
COMER
IS --

HEY!
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING
HERE?!



GOOD
AFTERNOON,
OFFICER.
I WAS
MERELY --

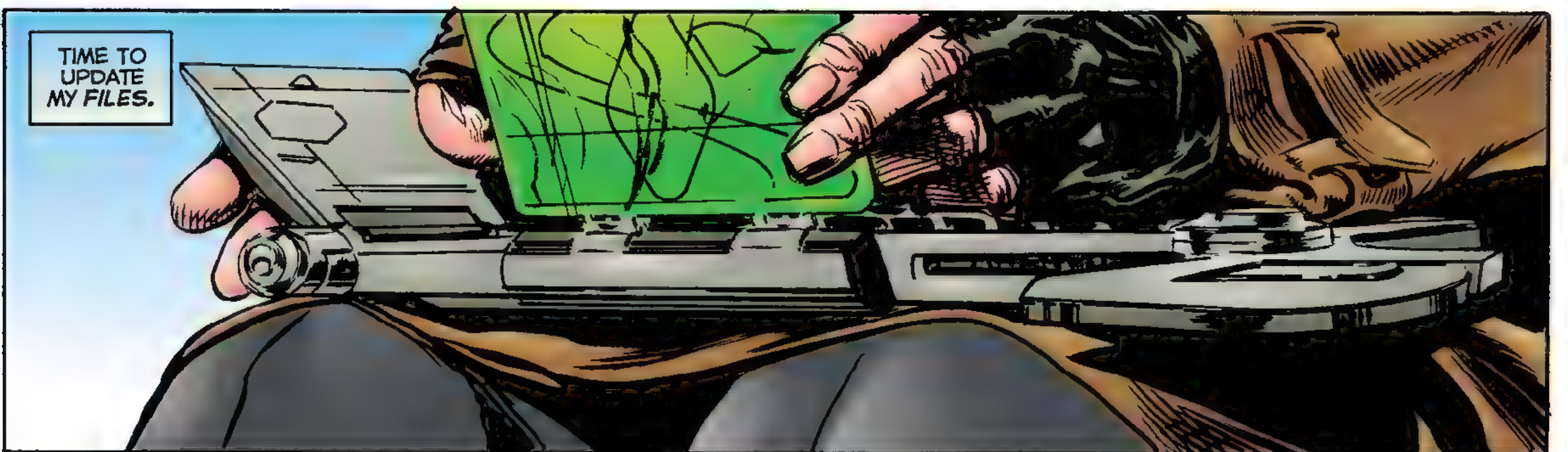
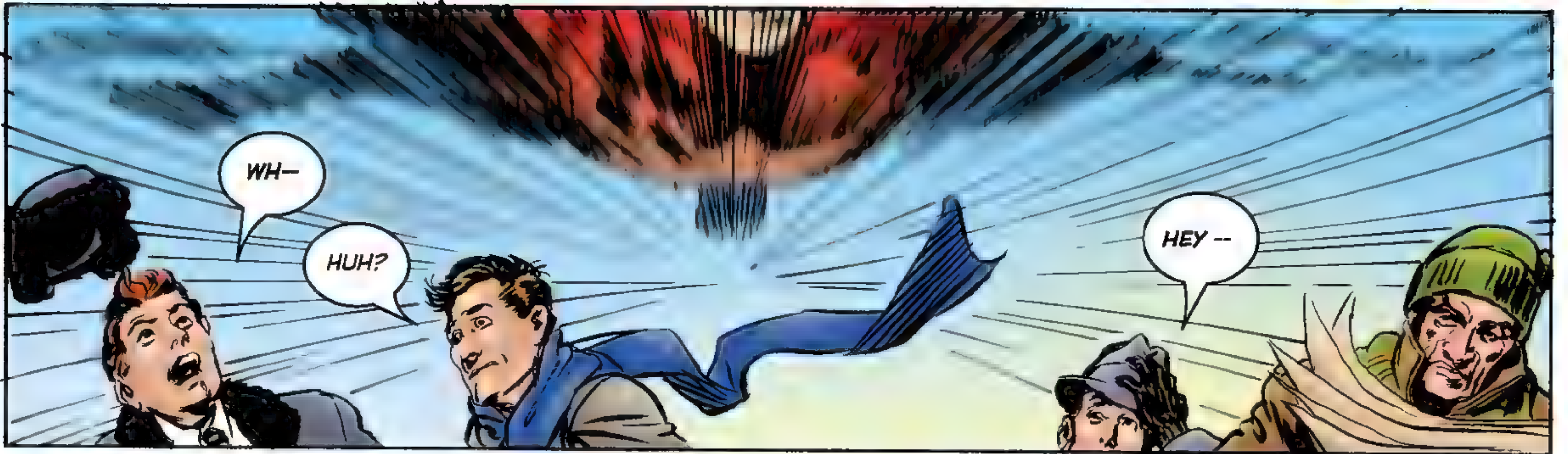
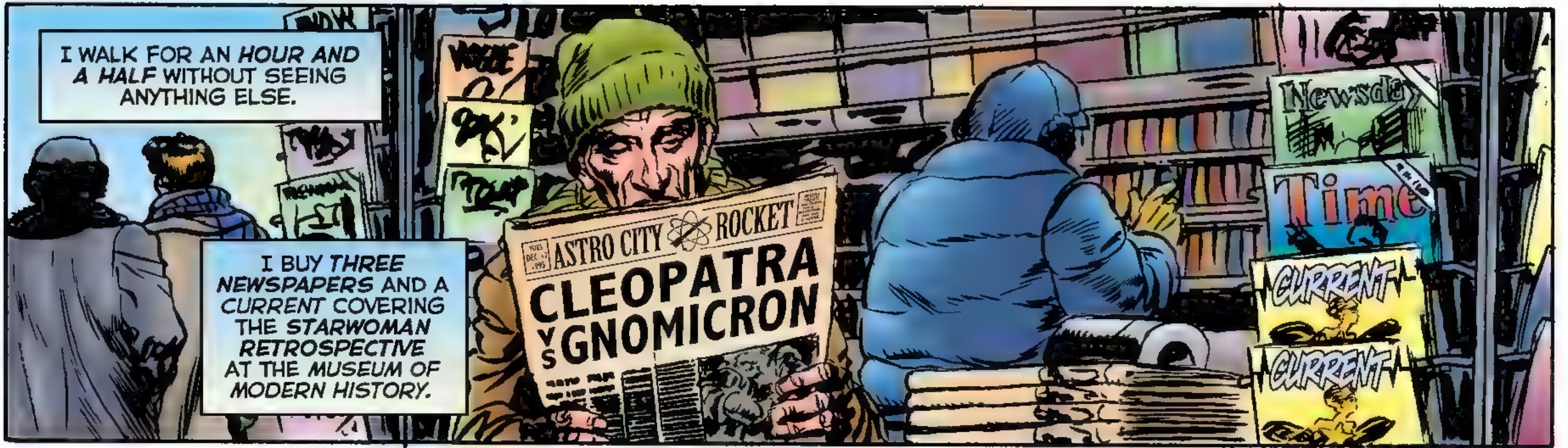
HOW
DID YOU GET
PAST THE POLICE
BLOCKADE DOWN
THE HILL? HOW'D YOU
GET THIS CLOSE
WITHOUT BEING
SPOTTED?



CRIPESAKES,
MAN, THIS IS
A BATTLE
ZONE!

GET
OUTTA HERE!
NOW!

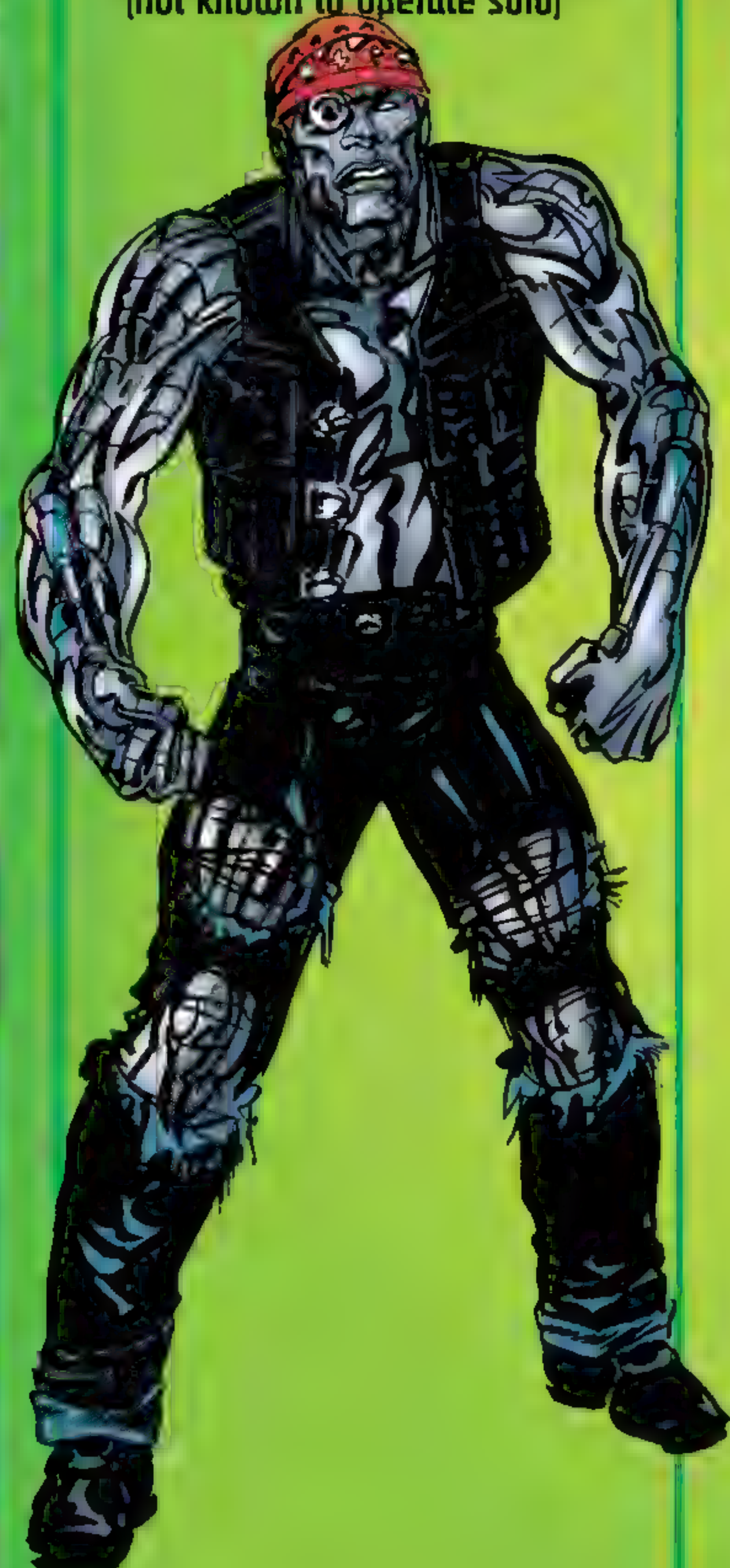
IT IS OF NO
CONSEQUENCE.
I HAVE SEEN
ENOUGH HERE.



DIRECTORY: SUPERPOWERS/ENHANCED ABILITIES FILE: INDIVIDUALS 7 **EDIT MODE**

SAMARITAN

STATUS: Inactive
(this star system)
BIRTH NAME:
Pr'slla of K'ntar



STATUS: Inactive
(this star system)
BIRTH NAME:
Pr'sila of K'ntar



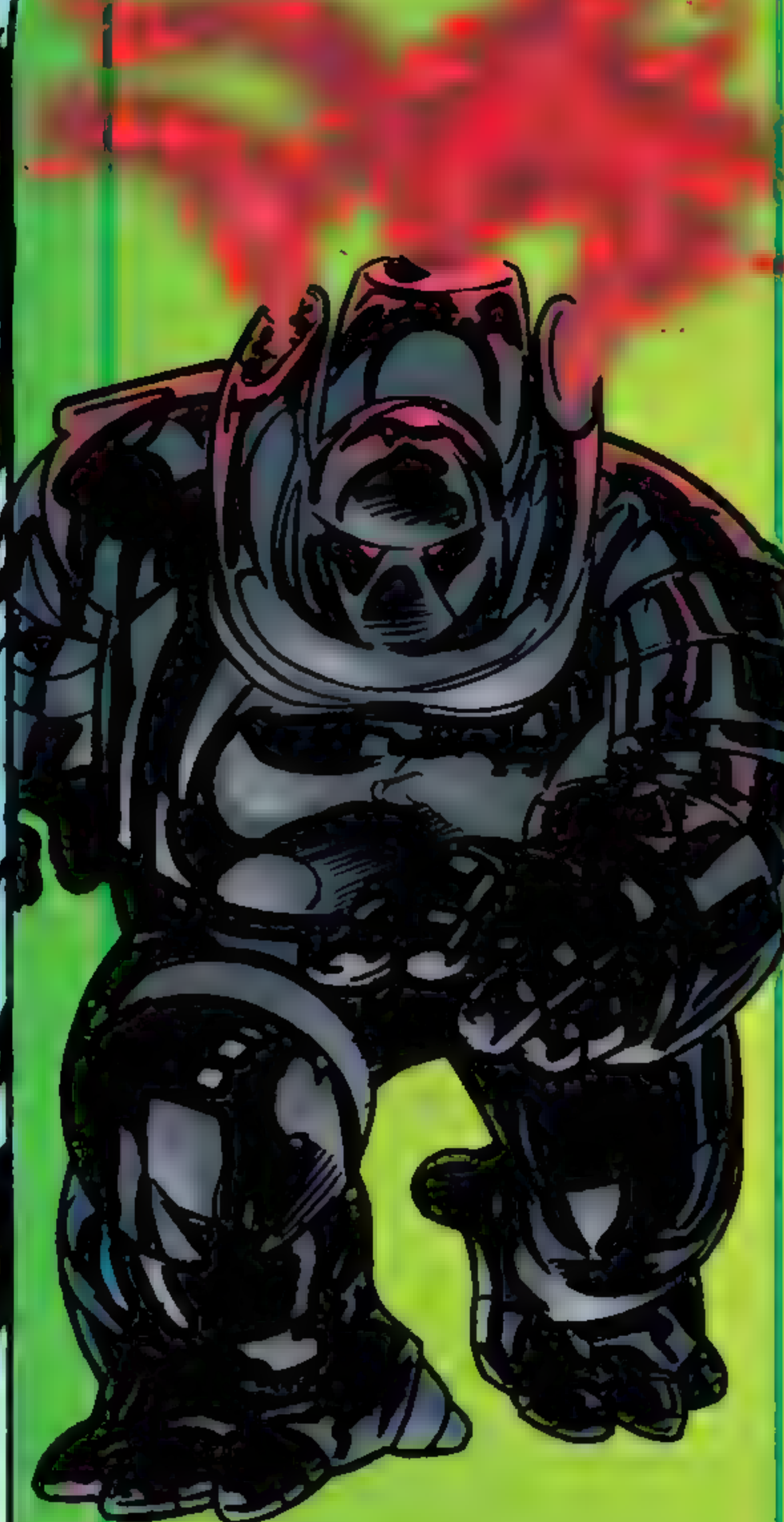
STATUS: Active
BIRTH NAME: Unknown



CAPSULE: Apparently enhanced human. Vast physical, energy powers [see expanded description]
AFFILIATION: Honor Guard
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Astro City
RANGE OF OPERATIONS:
 Global [solo] Global [w/team]
UPDATE: Potentially distractible
 [see behavioral pattern analysis]

QUARREL II

STATUS: Destroyed



BIRTH NAME: Inapplicable
CAPSULE: Mechanical Warrior
(powered by mystic furnace)
AFFILIATION: Mountain gnomes
BASE OF OPERATIONS:
Gilttertinden, Norway
RANGE OF OPERATIONS:
International (limited to
mountain areas)



CAPSULE: Sharpshooter w/specialized projectile launcher (see expanded description for projectile list); skilled athlete but no extra-human abilities
AFFILIATION: Honor Guard, personal connections to Street Angel (poss. defunct), Crackerjack
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Astro City
RANGE OF OPERATIONS: International
? [solo], Global [w/ team]

CONFESSOR

STATUS: Active
BIRTH NAME: Unknown

**NO KNOWN
PHOTOGRAPHS**

CAPSULE: Crimefighter, abilities not known
AFFILIATION: None known
BASE OF OPERATIONS: Astro City
RANGE OF OPERATIONS: Astro City (w/rare exceptions)
UPDATE: Pattern of sightings concentrated in area of Grandenetti Cathedral

[illegible]

HEY,
WHASSUP?!



IZZAT THE NEW 720? MAN, I READ ABOUT THOSE!

SWEET MACHINE, MAN! CAN I --

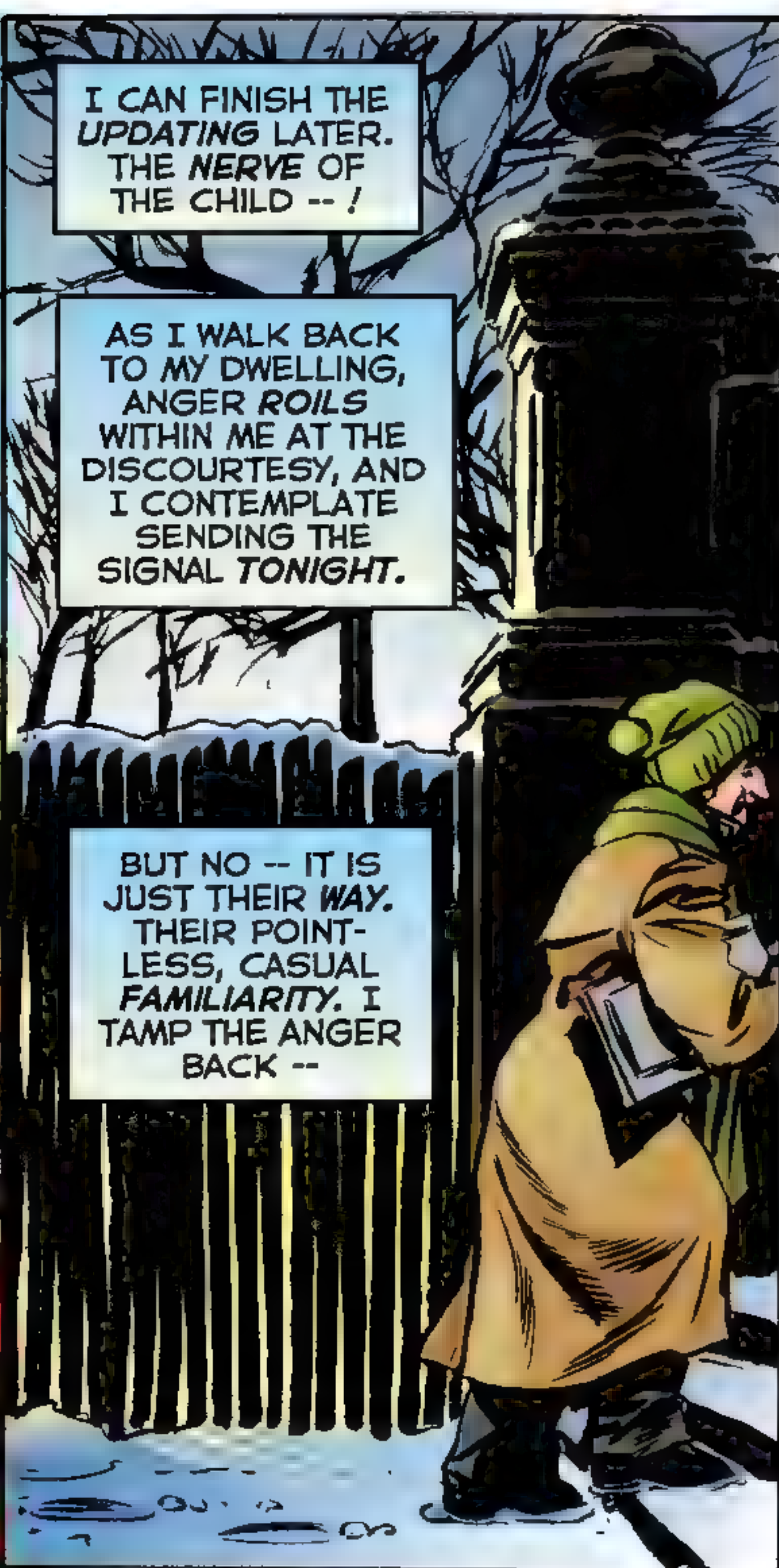
DON'T TOUCH IT!



IT IS NOT YOUR PRECIOUS 720, AND WHAT IT IS IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN!

NOW BE OFF WITH YOU!

GEEZ! OVERREACT MUCH?!



I CAN FINISH THE UPDATING LATER. THE NERVE OF THE CHILD --!

AS I WALK BACK TO MY DWELLING, ANGER ROILS WITHIN ME AT THE DISCOURTESY, AND I CONTEMPLATE SENDING THE SIGNAL TONIGHT.

BUT NO -- IT IS JUST THEIR WAY. THEIR POINTLESS, CASUAL FAMILIARITY. I TAMP THE ANGER BACK --



-- RECAPTURING MY COVER PERSONALITY BY THE TIME I REACH MY DESTINATION.

HEY, MR. BRIDWELL -- LITTLE COLD OUT, ISN'T IT?

COLD AIR IS BETTER THAN WALLS, EUGENE. I AM CONTENT.



AND YOUR AUDITION? THAT WAS TODAY, YES?

YOU DON'T MISS A THING, MR. BRIDWELL. I STILL DON'T KNOW HOW THEY'RE GOING TO DO A MUSICAL OF "INHERIT THE WIND" --



-- BUT THEY'RE GOING TO MANAGE WITHOUT ME, IT SEEMS. THEY SAID MY DANCING WASN'T "LAWYERLY" ENOUGH.

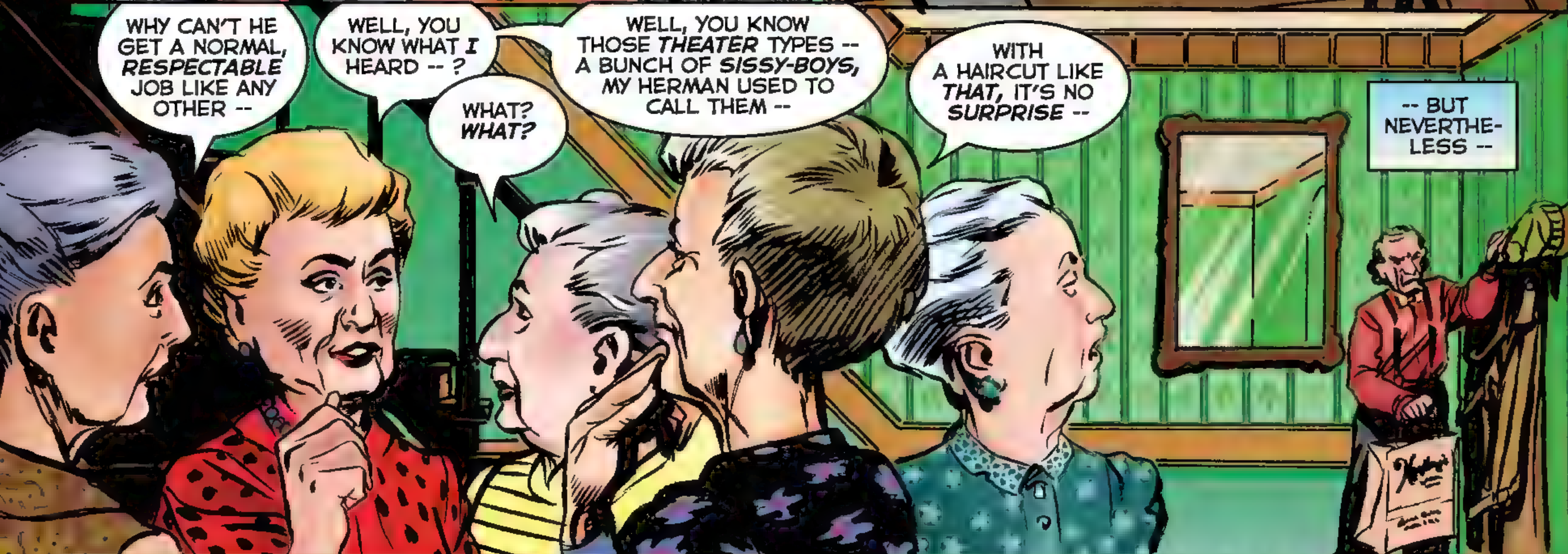
HEY, LADIES!

EUGENE WALLACE IS A GENIAL FAILURE -- AN AFFABLE NOBODY WITH A SMILE FOR EVERYONE HE ENCOUNTERS --



GOOD AFTERNOON, EUGENE!

ANOTHER REJECTION -- YOU'D THINK THE BOY WOULD LEARN!



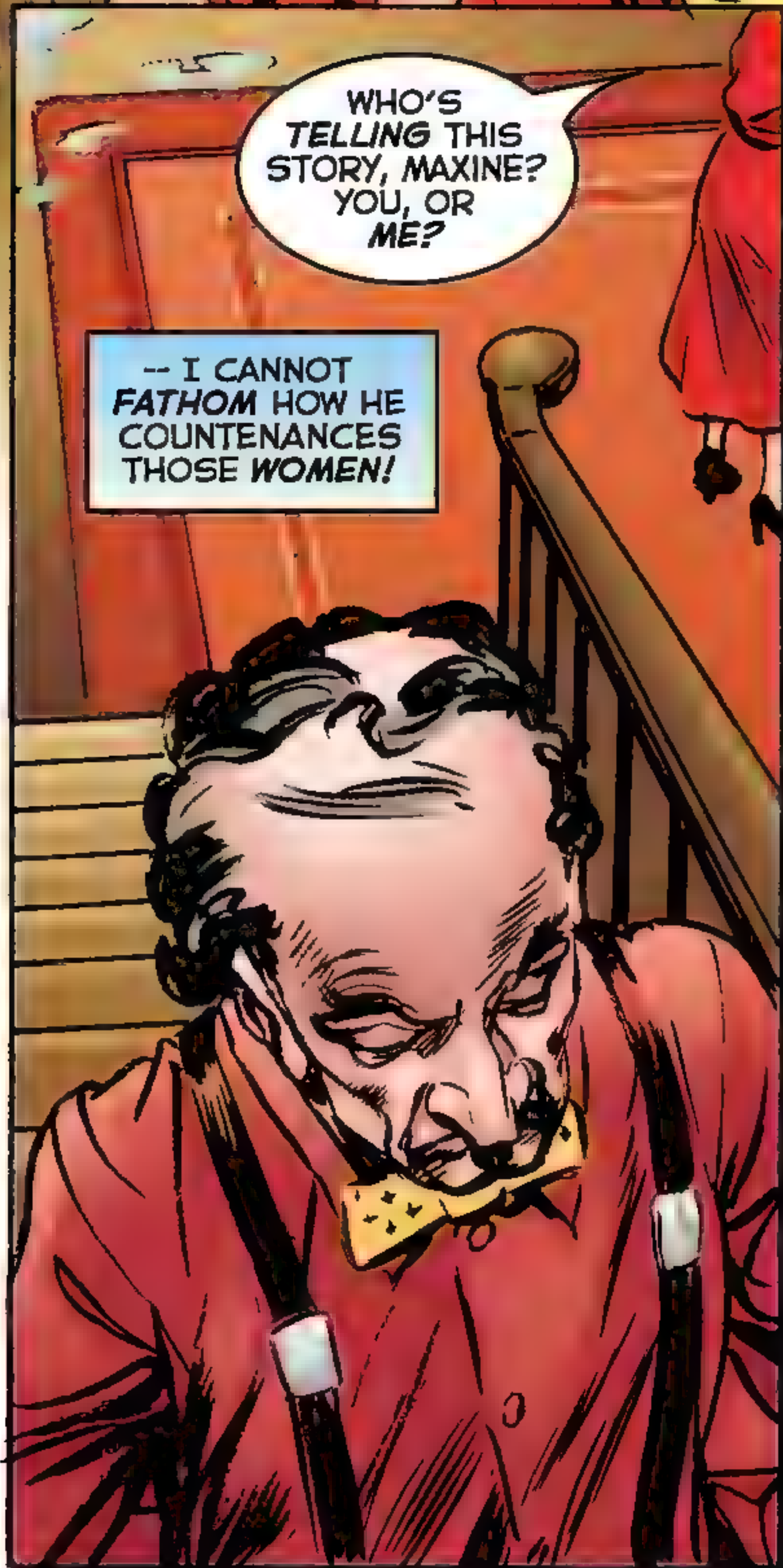
WHY CAN'T HE GET A NORMAL, RESPECTABLE JOB LIKE ANY OTHER --

WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT I HEARD -- ?

WELL, YOU KNOW THOSE THEATER TYPES -- A BUNCH OF SISSY-BOYS, MY HERMAN USED TO CALL THEM --

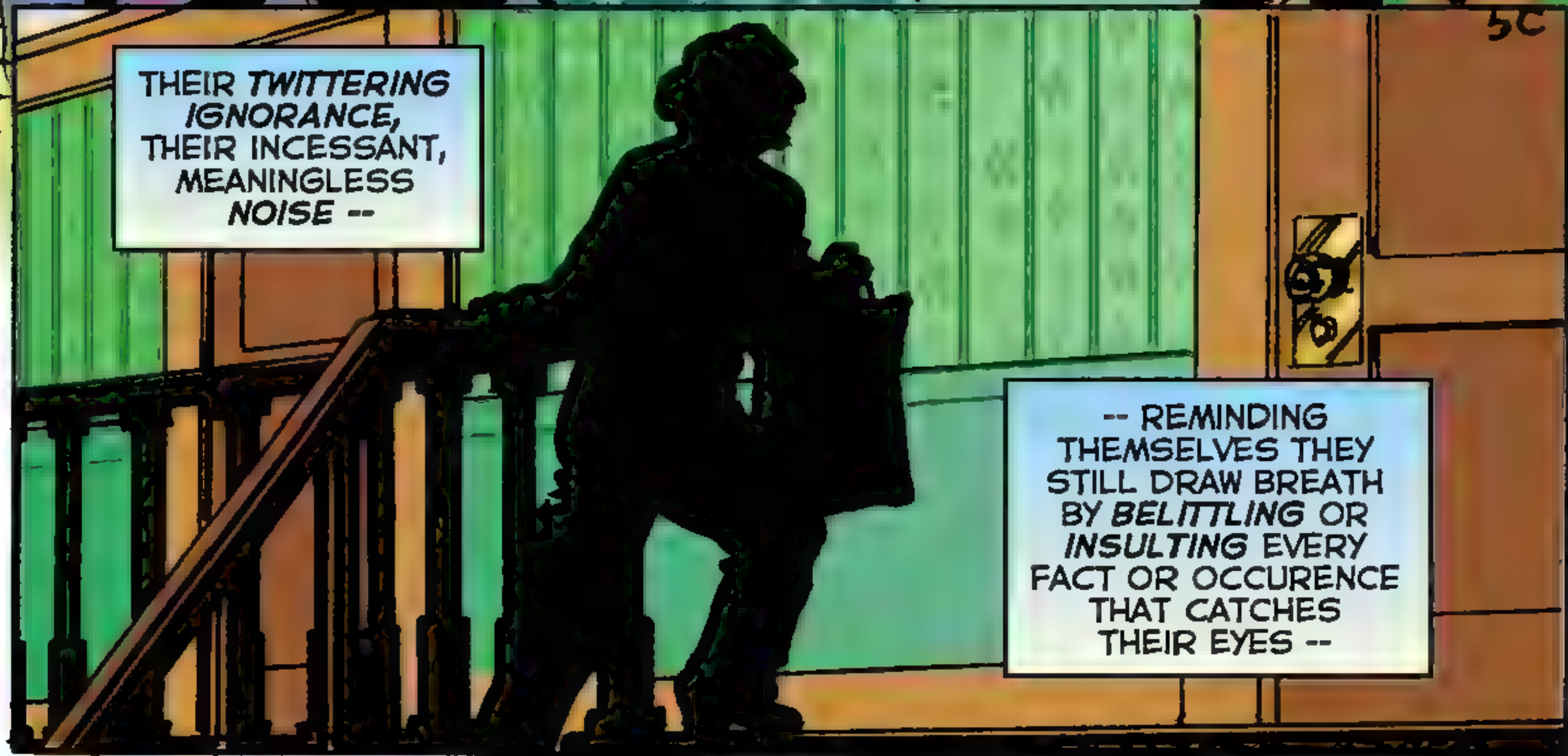
WITH A HAIRCUT LIKE THAT, IT'S NO SURPRISE --

-- BUT NEVERTHELESS --



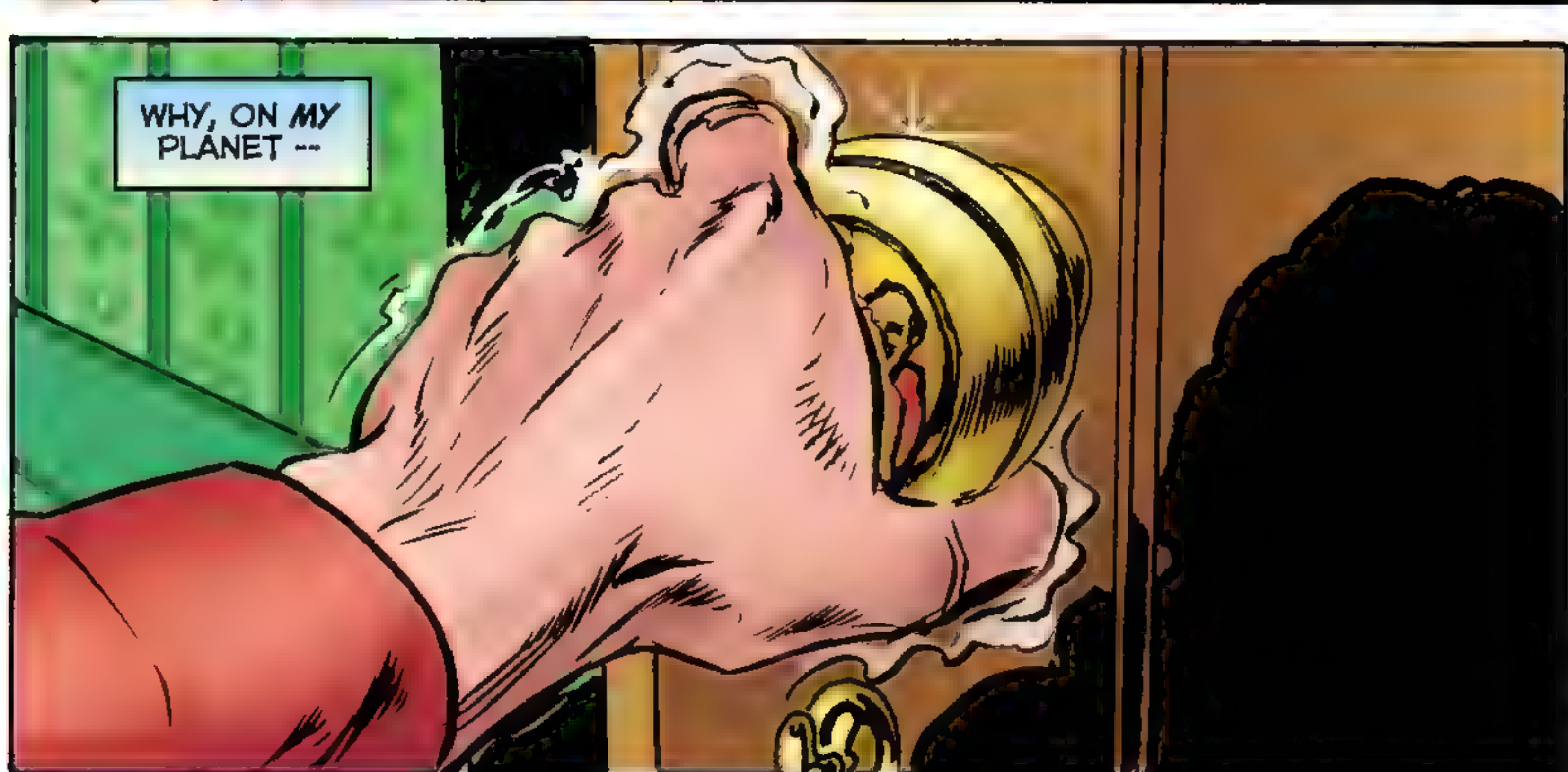
WHO'S TELLING THIS STORY, MAXINE? YOU, OR ME?

-- I CANNOT FATHOM HOW HE COUNTENANCES THOSE WOMEN!



THEIR TWITTERING IGNORANCE, THEIR INCESSANT, MEANINGLESS NOISE --

-- REMINDING THEMSELVES THEY STILL DRAW BREATH BY BELITTLING OR INSULTING EVERY FACT OR OCCURENCE THAT CATCHES THEIR EYES --



WHY, ON MY PLANET --

-- ON MY PLANET, WOMEN
ARE **WARRIORS** -- BOLD
AND **STRONG**, WHOSE
ACTIONS AND WORDS HAVE
WEIGHT AND FORCE!

I, A MERE **MALE**,
AM PRIVILEGED TO
SERVE MY EMPIRE
AS NOTHING BUT
EYES IN THE
SHADOWS -- BUT
EVEN I MATTER!

IT WOULD ALMOST BE
WORTH IT TO SEND THE
SIGNAL, TO SET THE
WHEELS OF INVASION
IN **MOTION** --

-- SIMPLY TO SEE
THOSE WOMEN
DRAGGED SCREAMING
TO THE WORK PITS
TO TOIL THEMSELVES
INTO THE GRAVE, THEIR
TWITTERING SILENCED
FOREVER!

BUT --

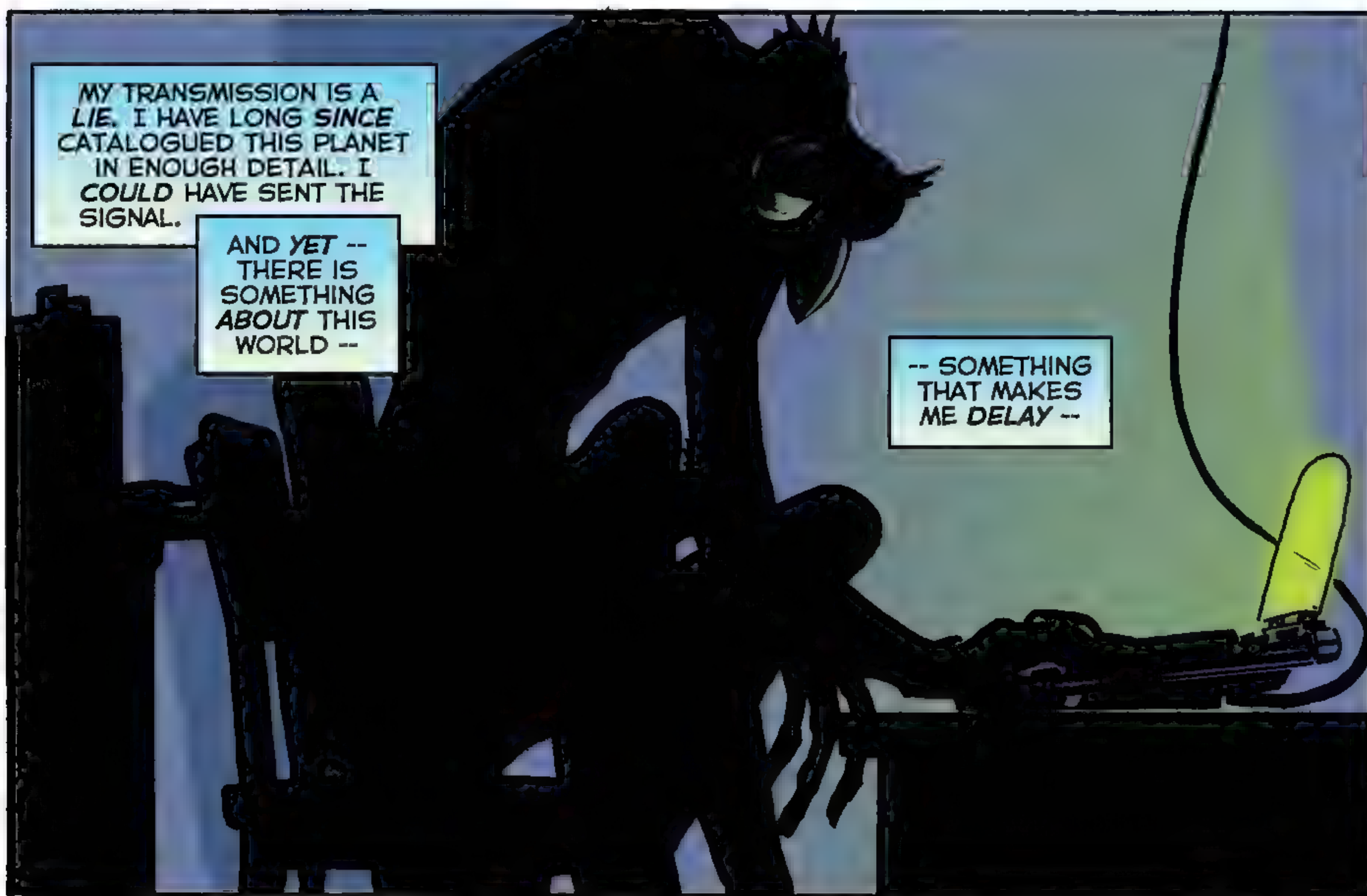
TRANSMISSION
CONNECTION
ESTABLISHED.
AWAITING
SIGNAL.

BUT --

RECONNAISSANCE
CONTINUES.

EXTENSIVE
PARANORMAL
ACTIVITY REQUIRES
MORE TIME TO
CATALOGUE. NO
DETERMINATION
REACHED.

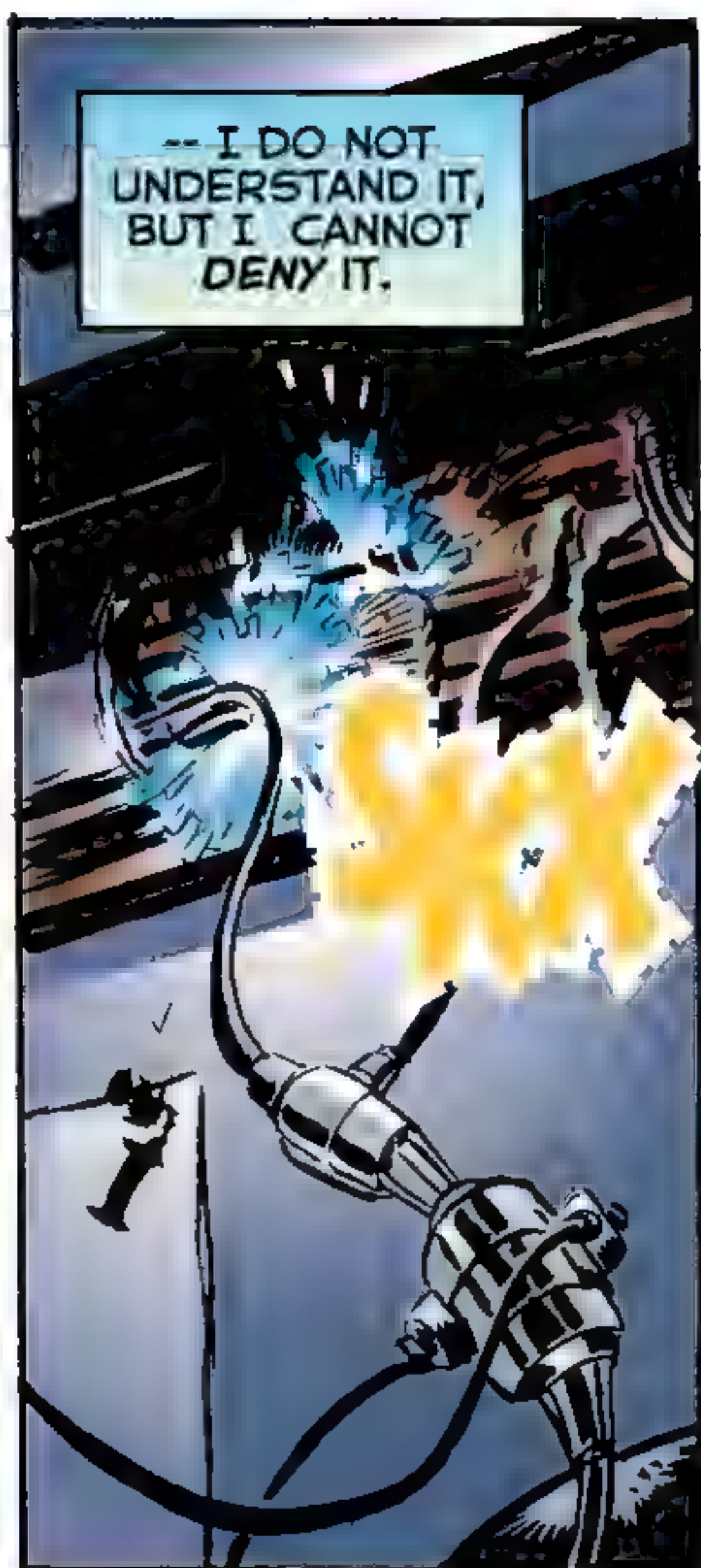
TEH



MY TRANSMISSION IS A LIE. I HAVE LONG SINCE CATALOGUED THIS PLANET IN ENOUGH DETAIL. I COULD HAVE SENT THE SIGNAL.

AND YET -- THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THIS WORLD --

-- SOMETHING THAT MAKES ME DELAY --



-- I DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT, BUT I CANNOT DENY IT.



I RETIRE TROUBLED, AND AWAKEN TO HEAT AND THICK, ACRID SMOKE.

THERE ARE SHOUTS OUTSIDE, AND A STRANGE ROARING FROM BEYOND THE WALLS OF MY ROOM.



THE BUILDING -- IT IS ON FIRE.

Oh! MR. BRIDWELL -- HE'S STILL UP THERE!



LOOK! SAVE HIM -- SAVE HIM!

IT'S SO HORRIBLE --!

SOME SORT OF INADEQUACY OF TERRESTRIAL METALLURGY -- OF THE PLUMBING AND WIRING IN THE BUILDING --

-- MY TRANSMISSION SIGNALS HAVE FINALLY OVERHEATED IT -- KINDLED THE WOODEN FRAME --

WHAT CAN
I DO?

I COULD SHAPE-SHIFT
EASILY, REACH THE
GROUND THAT WAY --

-- BUT THEY WOULD
SEE ME -- MY DISGUISE
WOULD BE LIFTED --

THE FLOOR --
SO HOT --

HEADS
UP IN THERE, YOU
LUCKY UNFORTUNATE,
YOU -- AND BETTER HAVE
YOUR AUTOGRAPH
BOOK READY --

Eh -- ?

CRACKLE

-- 'CAUSE
YOU'RE SURE TO
WANT A MEMENTO OF
THIS DARING RESCUE
TO SHOW TO YOUR
GRANDCHILDREN
SOMEDAY!

AND IN
YOUR CASE,
SIR -- THAT MAY
MEAN TOMORROW!
BA-DA-BUMP!

WHAT,
NO WORDS OF
WELCOME, NO
HOSANNAS FOR YOUR
HERO? YOU'RE A
TOUGH AUDIENCE,
POPS!

HE WAS AT THE BATTLE
EARLIER TODAY.
CRACKERJACK,
REAL NAME UNKNOWN.
ATHLETIC. NO KNOWN
SUPERPOWERS.

I'VE COME TO SUSPECT
HE MAY LIVE NEAR HERE.
HIS SWIFT APPEARANCE
ON THE SCENE --



-- WOULD SEEM TO CONFIRM THAT.

WHOAAA!

HEY, NO KNOCKING THE HERO OFF-BALANCE, POPS --

-- ESPECIALLY WHEN HE'S SAVING YOUR LIFE!

IT WAS HIS OWN WEIGHT THAT MADE THE FLOOR GIVE WAY, BUT I DON'T CORRECT HIM.



HE REACTS QUITE SMOOTHLY AS HE AVOIDS FALLING WRECKAGE, TAKING US INTO THE STAIRWELL AND DOWN TO THE MAIN FLOOR.

I HAVE NEVER BEEN ABLE TO OBSERVE A COSTUMED ADVENTURER FROM QUITE THIS VANTAGE POINT --



-- AND I MUST ADMIT --

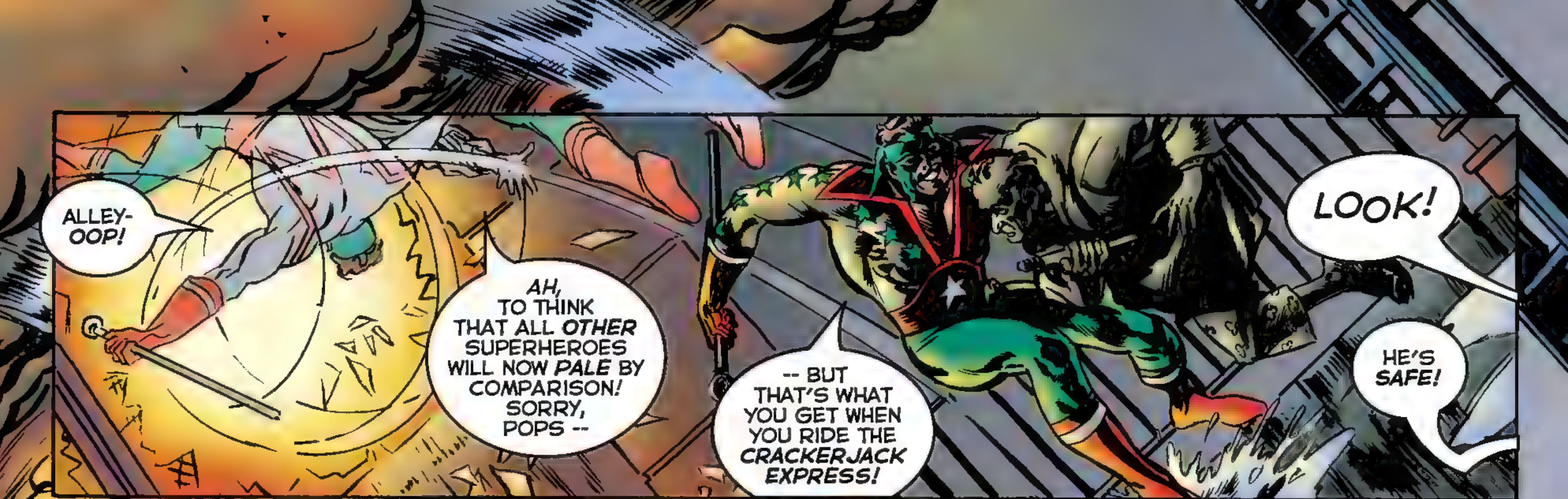
YOU KNOW, THE SERVICE IN HERE IS TERRIBLE. WHADDYA SAY, POPS --



KRASSH

-- HIS PHYSICAL SKILLS ARE QUITE IMPRESSIVE.

-- LET'S BLOW THIS POPSICLE STAND!



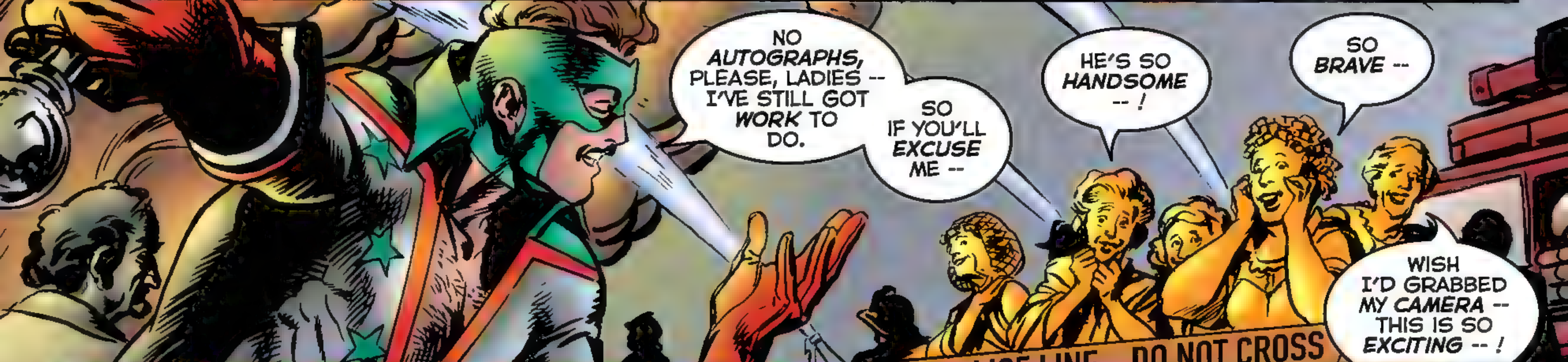
ALLEY-OOP!

AH, TO THINK THAT ALL OTHER SUPERHEROES WILL NOW PALE BY COMPARISON! SORRY, POPS --

-- BUT THAT'S WHAT YOU GET WHEN YOU RIDE THE CRACKERJACK EXPRESS!

LOOK!

HE'S SAFE!



NO AUTOGRAPHS, PLEASE, LADIES -- I'VE STILL GOT WORK TO DO.

SO IF YOU'LL EXCUSE ME --

HE'S SO HANDSOME -- !

SO BRAVE --

WISH I'D GRABBED MY CAMERA -- THIS IS SO EXCITING -- !



OH, NO -- !

MY RECORD COLLECTION!



HIS --

WHAT?

BUT THEN --

Uh --

POLICE LINE - DO NOT CROSS



GOTTA GO!

HE MUST BE --

IT CAN'T BE!

THAT -- THAT EUGENE BOY -- !

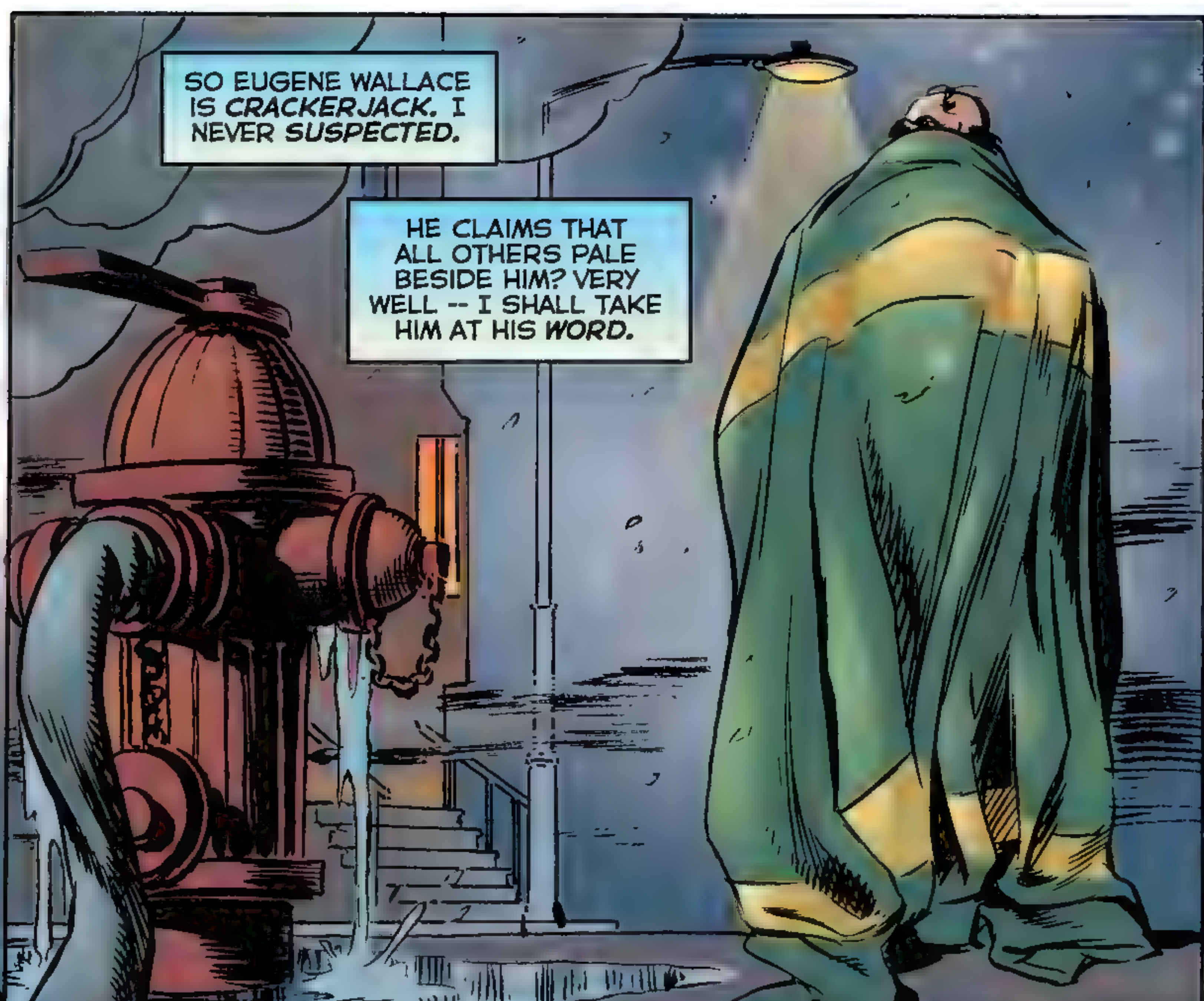
ALWAYS SO QUIET --



THEY TWITTER AMONG THEMSELVES, REASSERTING ORDER IN THEIR MEANINGLESS LITTLE LIVES WITH EMPTY WORDS --

-- AND SUDDENLY I WANT A RESOLUTION.

I WANT TO END THIS, TO GET AWAY FROM THEIR CHATTER FOREVER.



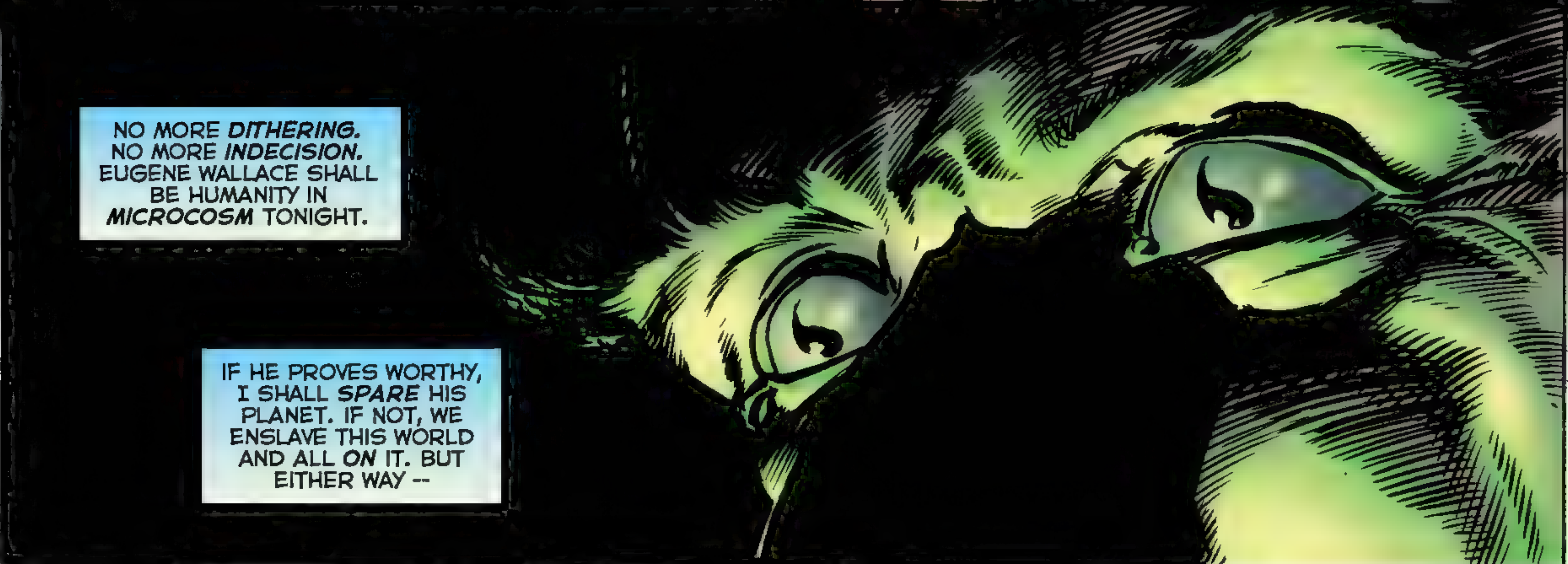
SO EUGENE WALLACE IS CRACKERJACK. I NEVER SUSPECTED.

HE CLAIMS THAT ALL OTHERS PALE BESIDE HIM? VERY WELL -- I SHALL TAKE HIM AT HIS WORD.



WHILE HE RESCUED ME, I ATTACHED A SENS-CIRCUIT TO HIS BELT. IT WILL LET ME SEE AND HEAR WHATEVER HAPPENS TO HIM.

I SHALL OBSERVE HIM UNTIL DAWN, AND THEN I SHALL MAKE MY FINAL JUDGMENT.



NO MORE DITHERING. NO MORE INDECISION. EUGENE WALLACE SHALL BE HUMANITY IN MICROCOSM TONIGHT.

IF HE PROVES WORTHY, I SHALL SPARE HIS PLANET. IF NOT, WE ENSLAVE THIS WORLD AND ALL ON IT. BUT EITHER WAY --

-- IT SHALL
ALL DEPEND
ON HIM.

FEE-LINGS!
WOH-OH-OH!
FEE-LINGS!

SOMETHING
SOMETHING LA LA --
FEELINGS OF --

SAY!

STEEL DEVIL!
WHAT, THEY PUT A
REVOLVING DOOR
IN THE JAIL? OR NO,
DON'T TELL ME -- THEY
LET YOU OUT TO
BUY CHRISTMAS
CARDS!

CRACKER-
JACK?!

YOU
WON'T STOP
ME -- I'LL
BLAST YOU TO
SMITHEREENS!

ZZAKT

YIPE!

WATCH
WHERE YOU
POINT THAT
THING,
S.D. --

-- IT
MIGHT BE
LOADED!

KK
RR
MM
BB
LL

OH,
GREAT...



HA!
ANOTHER
DARING TRIUMPH
FOR CRACKERJACK --
THE ACME OF
ADVENTURERS!

AND
NOT BAD
WORK, IF I
DO SAY SO
MYSELF...

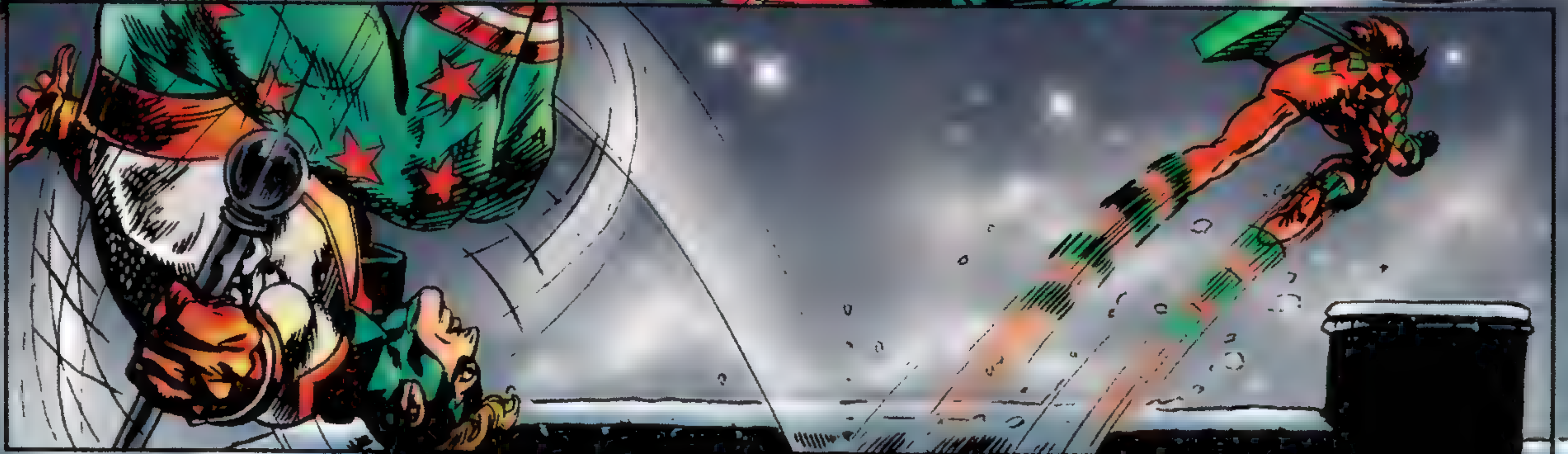
NOT BAD WORK?
HE IS SAVED BY
CHANCE, AND HE
CONSIDERS IT
A VICTORY?

HE
CONGRATULATES
HIMSELF?



HEY!

HEY,
JACK-IN-THE-BOX!
HOW'S IT HANGIN',
PAGLIACCI?



HMMPH!!

BE
LIKE THAT!
SEE IF I DON'T
GET A LAWYER
ON YOU FOR
UNAUTHORIZED USE
OF THE "JACK"
NAME...

JACK-IN-THE-BOX
DEBUTED IN 1964 --
OR 1989, IF ONE
ASSUMES THAT THE
CURRENT ONE IS
A DIFFERENT MAN.

HE PREDATES CRACKERJACK
BY EITHER TWO YEARS, OR
TWENTY-SEVEN. IF ANYONE HAS
CLAIM TO THE NAME, IT'S HIM.



SO THE WOMAN
SAYS, "YOU IDIOT --
THIS IS A DUCK,
NOT A PIG!" AND
THE BARTENDER
SAYS --

-- "I
WAS TALKING
TO THE
DUCK!"



FINE,
DON'T LAUGH!
SEE IF I
CARE!



HERE
YOU GO,
OFFICERS --



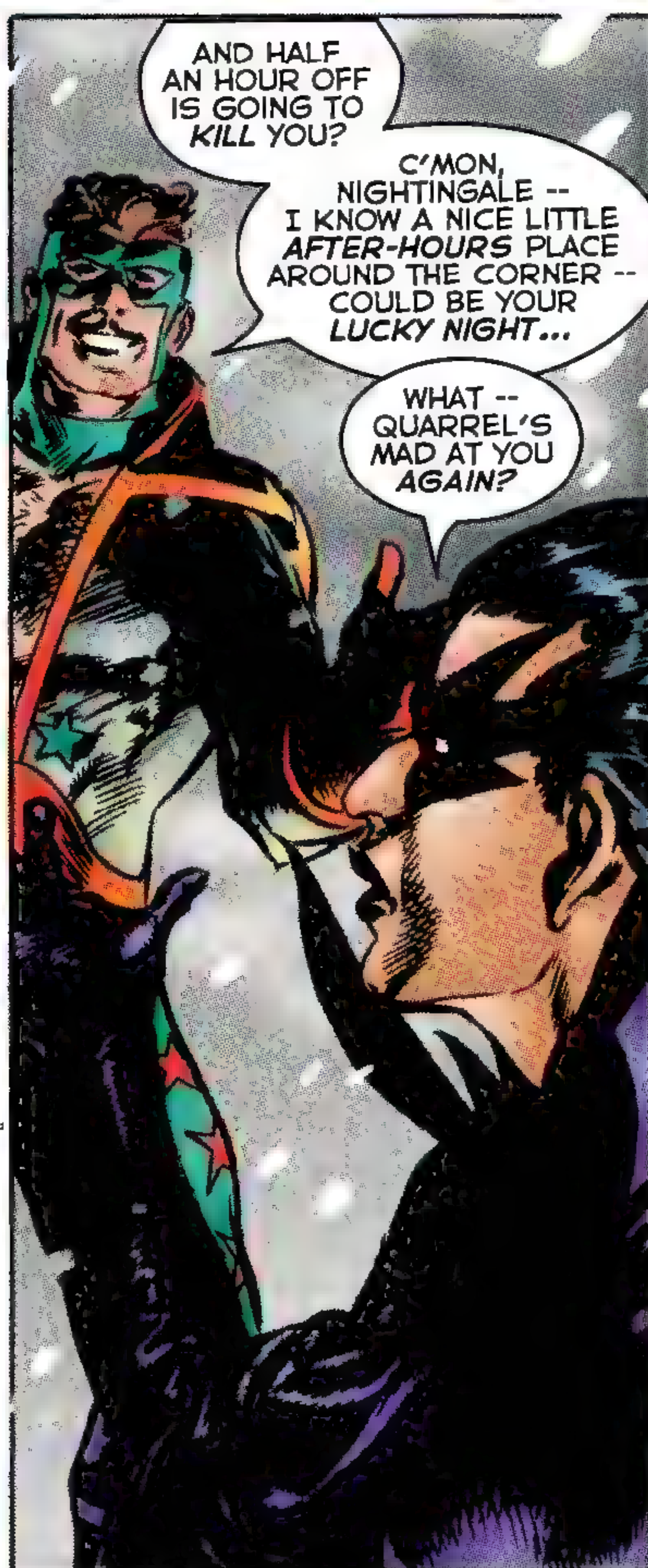
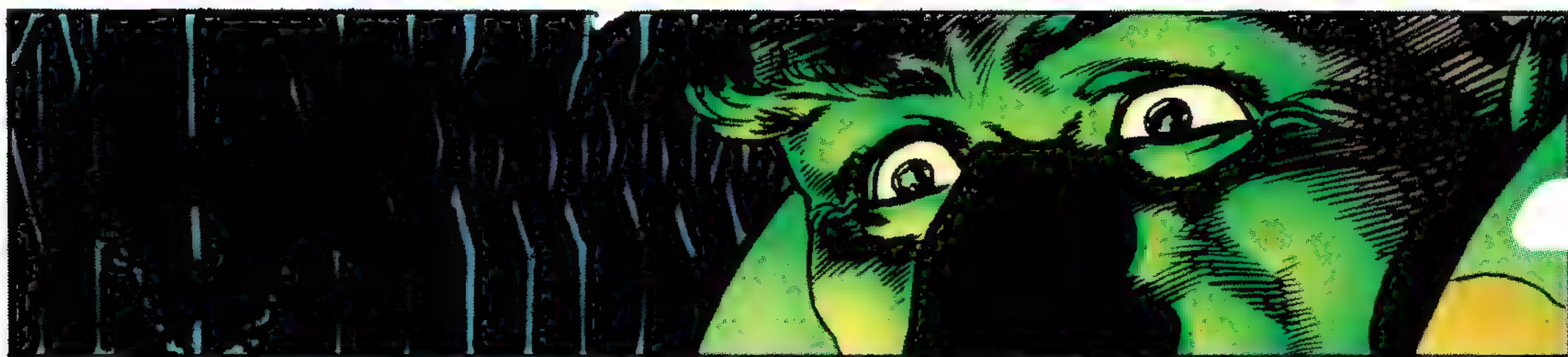
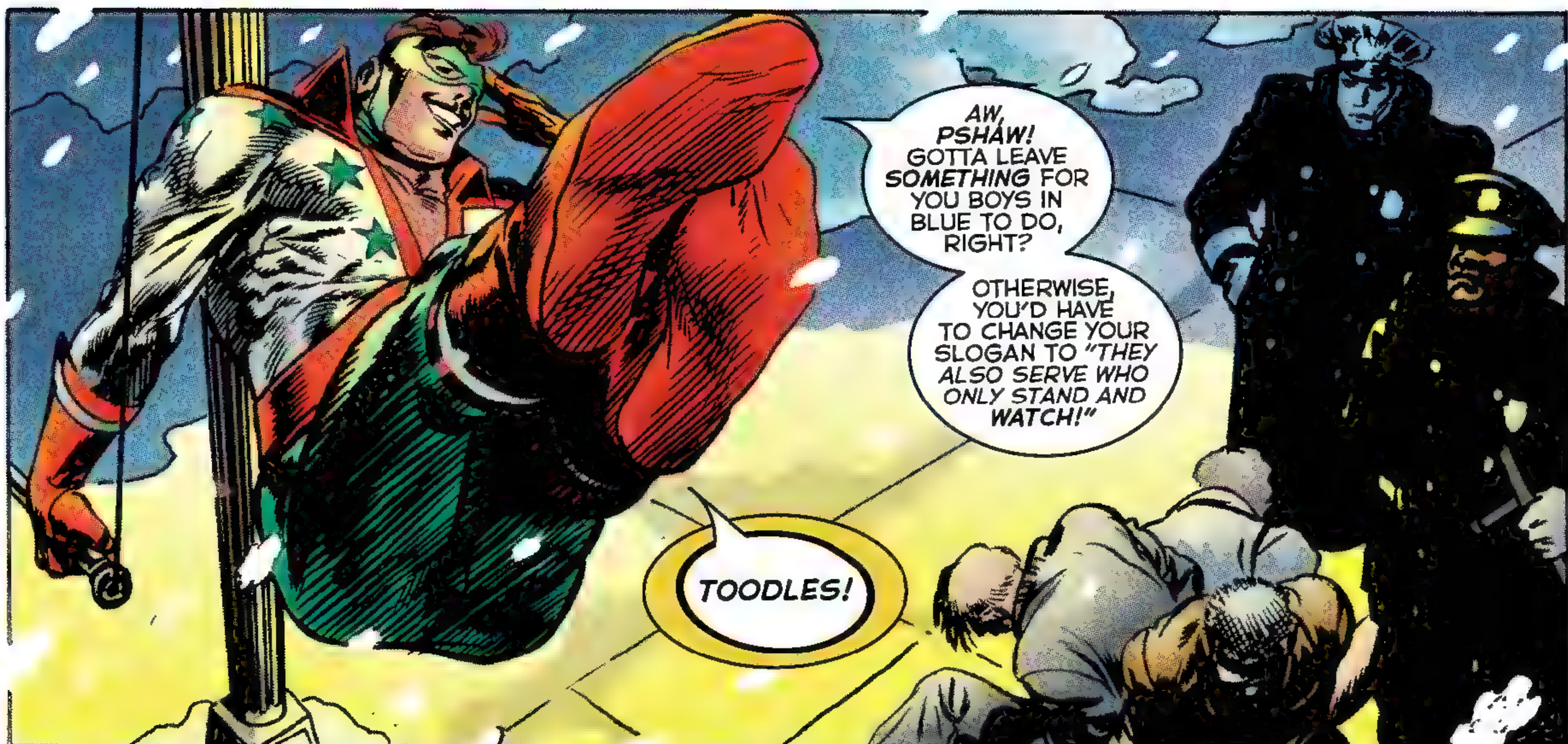
-- A TRIO
OF SLEEPING
NOT-SO-BEAUTIES,
COURTESY OF ASTRO
CITY'S OWN STAR
ATTRACTION!

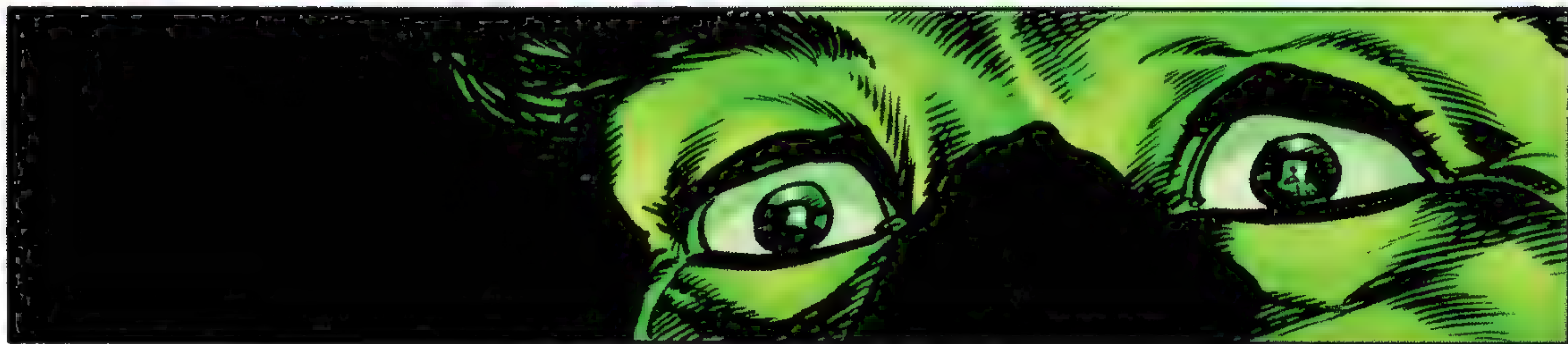
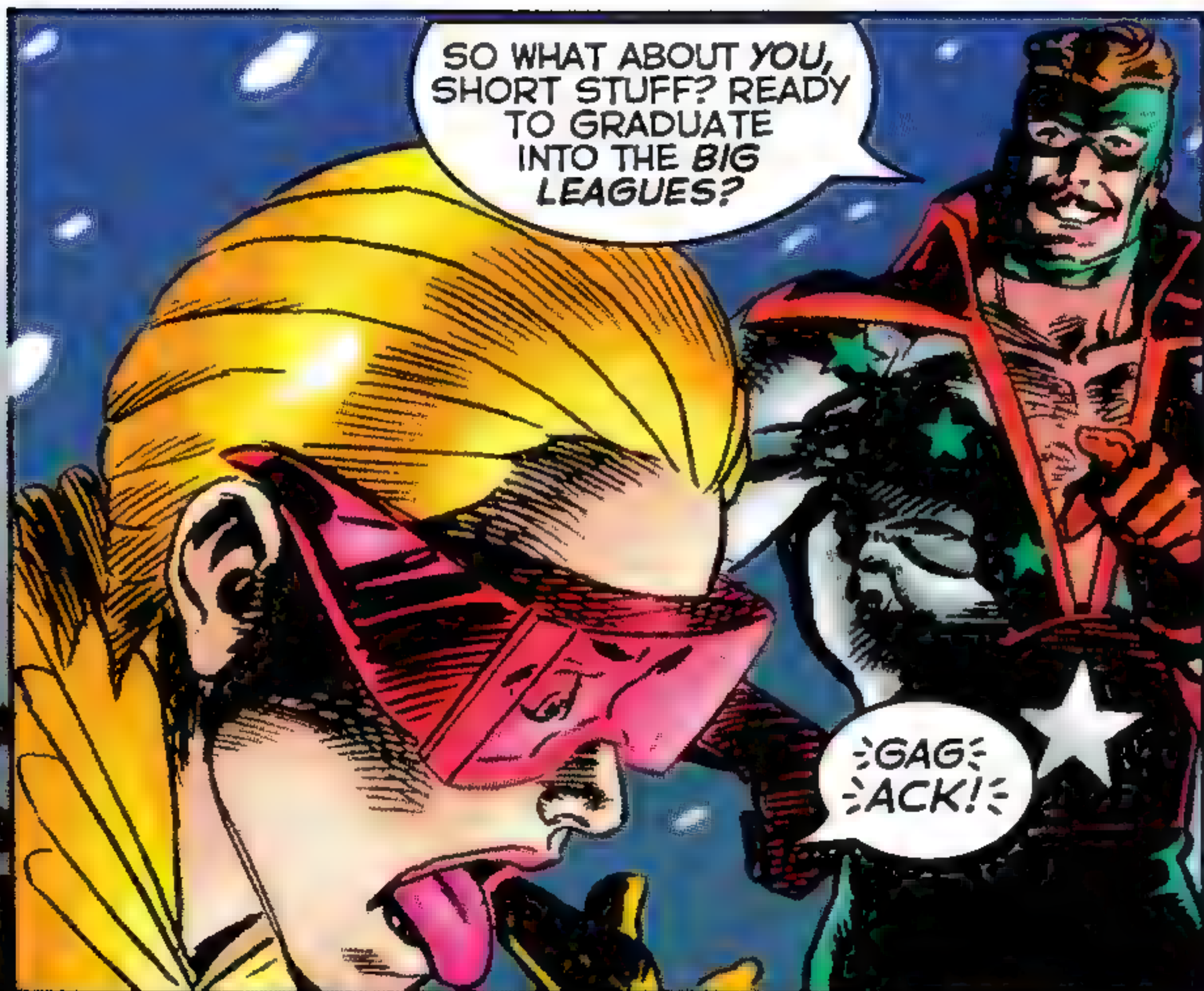
REALLY?
I DON'T SEE
SAMARITAN
AROUND
ANYWHERE...

I DON'T
SUPPOSE
YOU'VE GOT
ANY EVIDENCE
ON THESE
GUYS?

ANY
INDICATION
THEY WERE
ACTUALLY DOING
SOMETHING
CRIMINAL?









AH, LOOK
AT THAT
SUNRISE! WHAT
A GORGEOUS
SIGHT!

A FITTING
FINALE TO
ANOTHER SUCCESSFUL
NIGHT, MY LAD -- AND
A HARBINGER OF
MANY MORE TO
COME!

HE DEPENDS ON LUCK,
HE IS JEALOUS OF
OTHERS, HE DOES SLOPPY
WORK, HE STEALS CREDIT
FOR THE ACHIEVEMENTS
OF OTHERS --

-- AND HE CALLS
IT A SUCCESSFUL
NIGHT. HE LIES
EVEN TO HIMSELF.

HE IS NO PARAGON.
HE IS NOT AN
ADMIRABLE MAN.

AND
YET --

AND
YET --

-- WHEN OUR RACE WAS
YOUNG, WE WERE
DISMISSED AS THE
VERMIN OF THE
GALAXY, AND NOT
WITHOUT REASON.

WE WERE WEAK AND
STUPID, AND WE
LOST EVERY WAR WE
ENTERED INTO.

BUT WE NEVER
GAVE UP -- WE
NEVER STOPPED
STRIVING --

-- AND NOW, MILLENNIA
LATER, WE ARE
POWERFUL AND
RESPECTED AND
FEARED --

PERHAPS IT IS THAT
INDOMITABILITY IN THESE
HUMANS THAT STRIKES A
CHORD WITHIN ME.

PERHAPS I SHALL REPORT THAT IT
WOULD BE TOO MUCH TROUBLE TO
PACIFY THEM -- THAT THEY WOULD
RESIST BEYOND PROFITABILITY.

PERHAPS THIS
WORLD SHALL BE
LEFT ALONE --

-- IN THE WRECKAGE,
FIREMEN DISCOVERED
THE REMNANTS OF WIGS
AND OTHER DISGUISE
MATERIALS --

-- AND
IDENTIFICATION
DOCUMENTS IN
VARIOUS
NAMES.

THIS LEADS
TO SPECULATION
THAT "EUGENE WALLACE"
MAY NOT BE THE TRUE NAME
OF THE MAN BEHIND
THE MASK OF --

A SURPRISING SIGN
OF RESOURCEFULNESS.
PERHAPS HE IS MORE
THAN HE --

WELL, NATURALLY
WE KNEW HE WAS
SOMEBODY --
WE'VE GOT EYES,
DON'T WE?

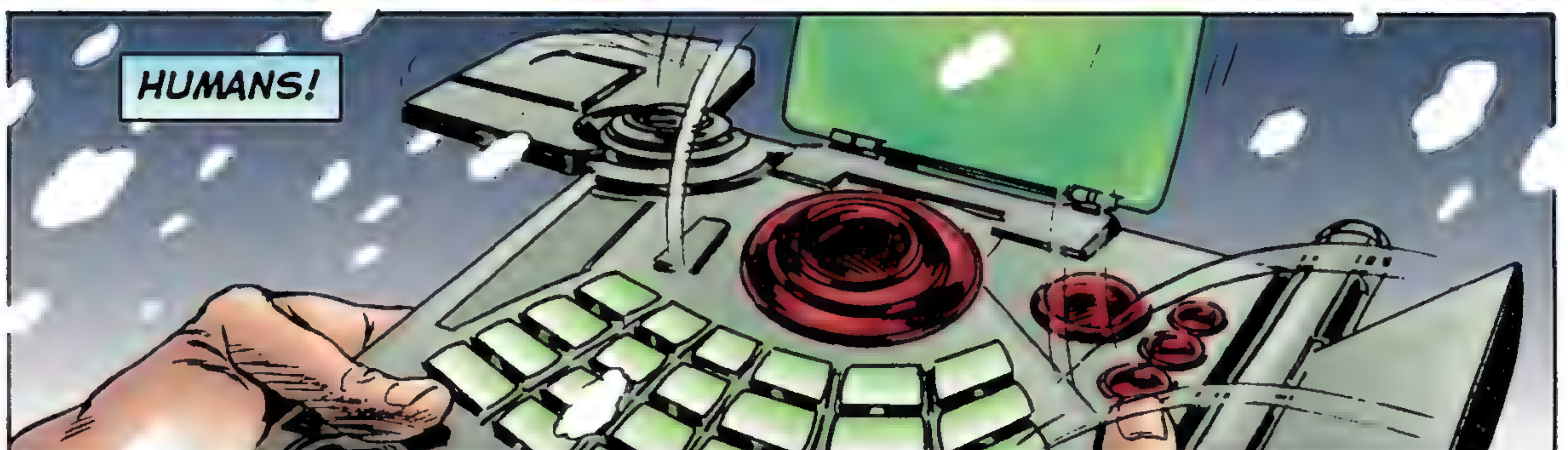
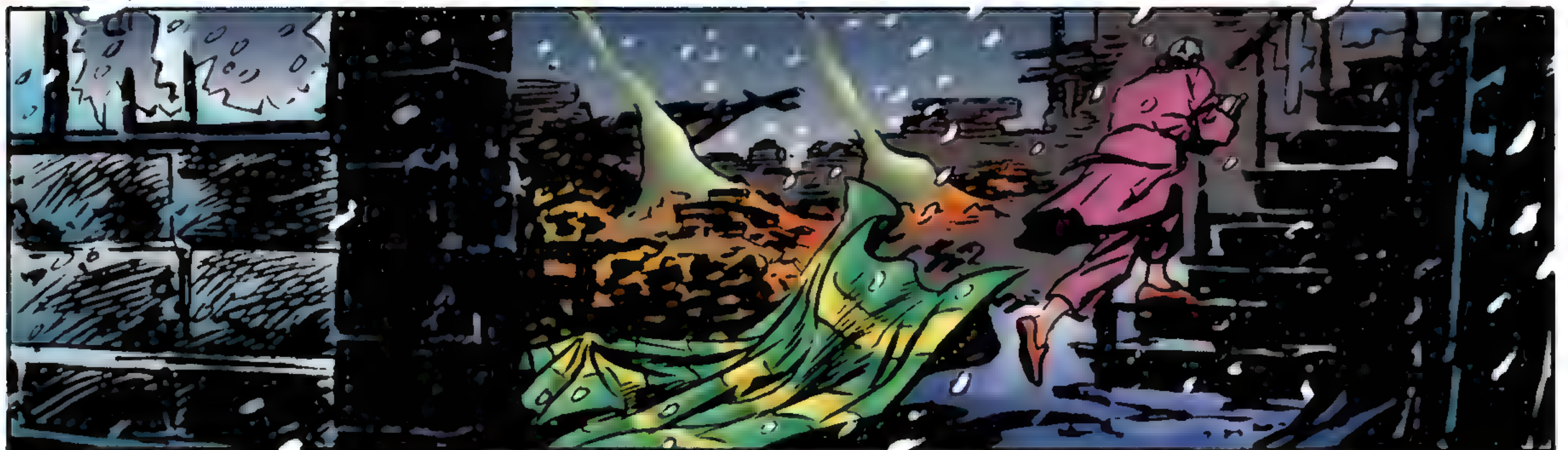
-- HAD MY
SUSPICIONS ALL
ALONG --

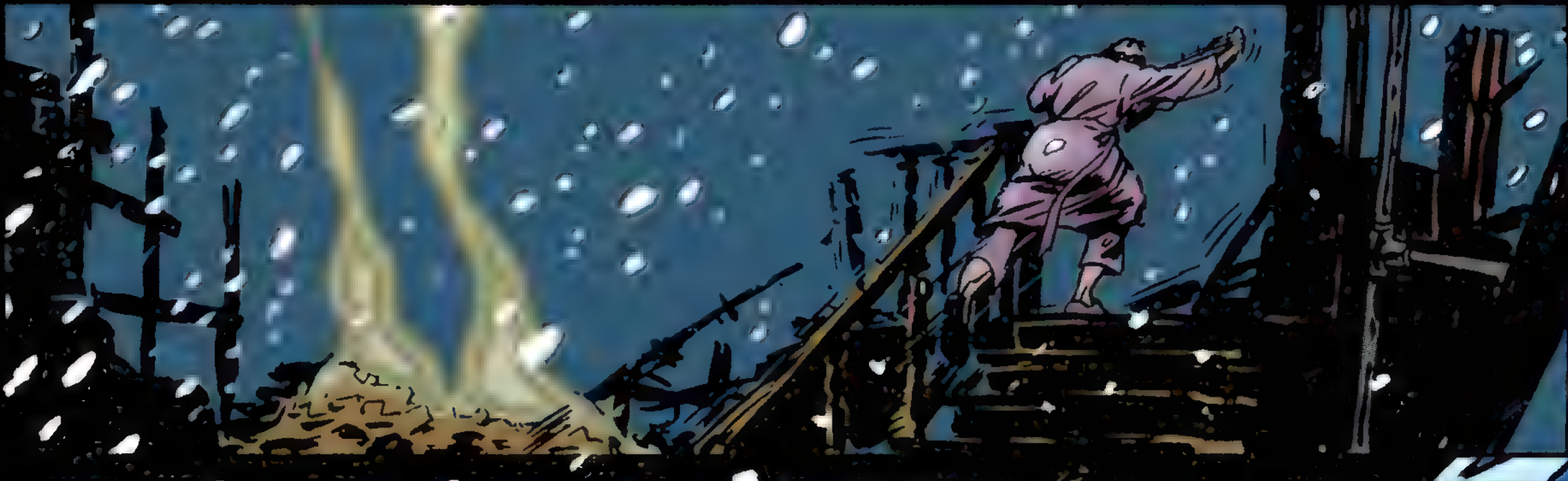
SUCH A NICE
YOUNG MAN, TOO --
EVERYONE LIKED
HIM --

-- BUT
REALLY, THAT
WIG --

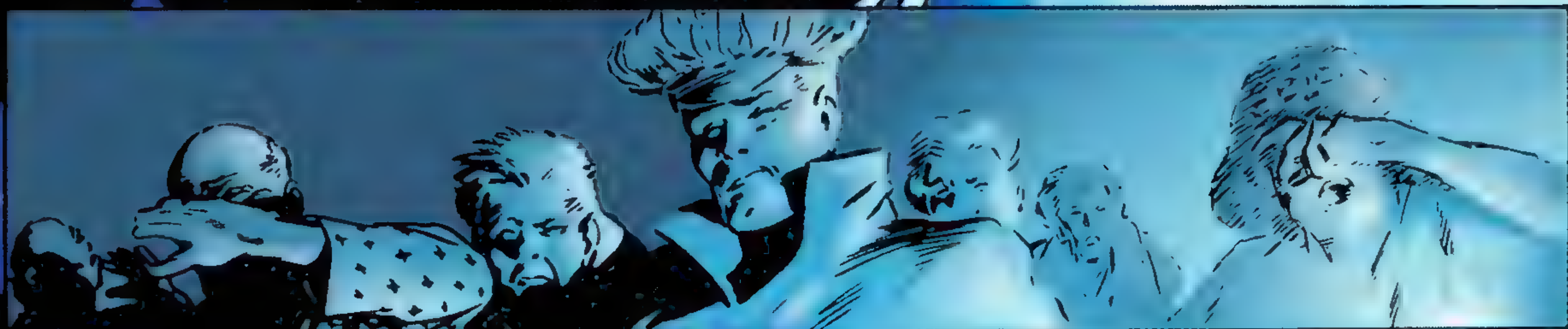
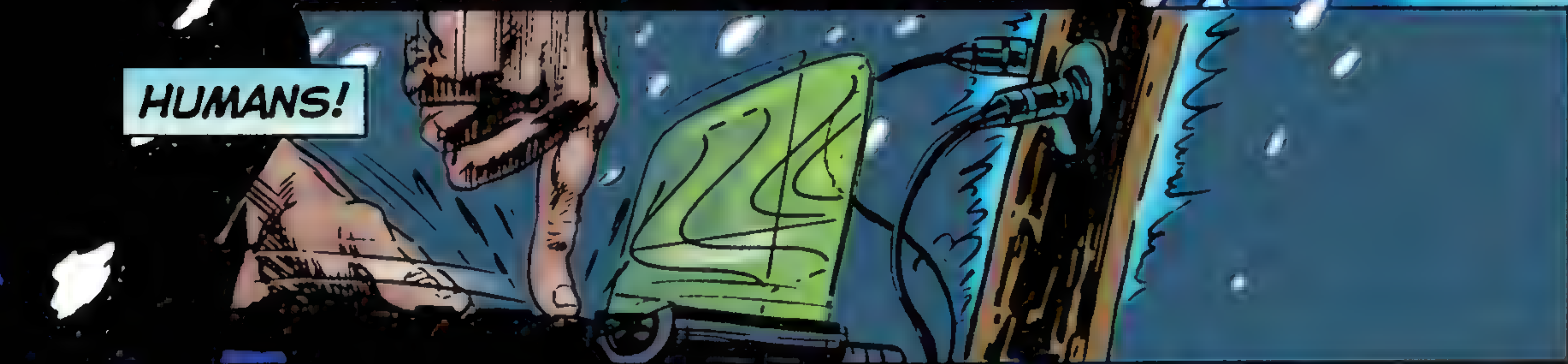
-- NOT AS IF IT WOULD HAVE
ESCAPED OUR NOTICE --
NOT SOMETHING THAT
OUT OF THE
ORDINARY --

-- NOT
UNDER OUR
OWN
ROOF --

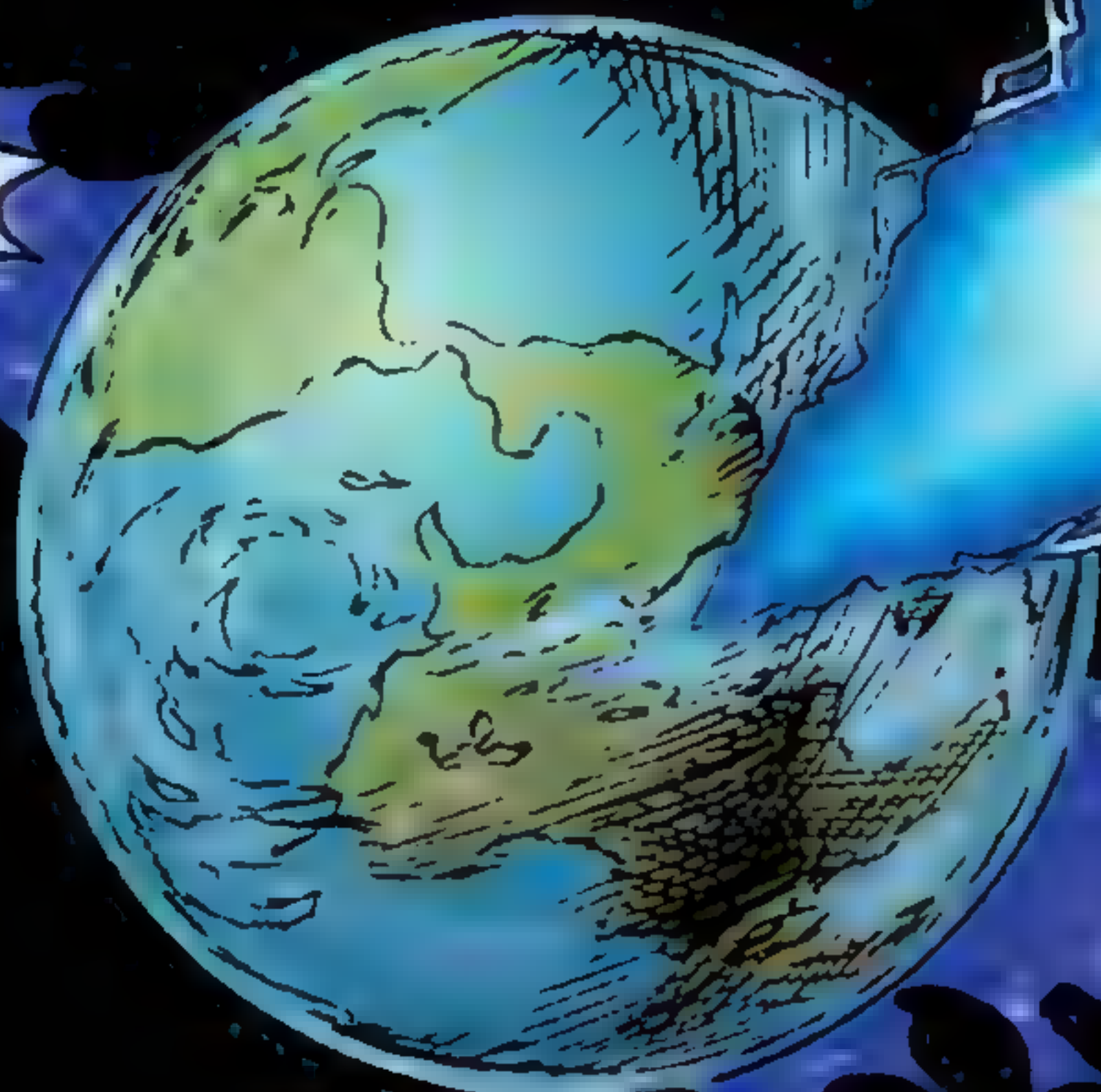




HUMANS!



SIGNAL
IS GO.
TRANSMISSION
COMPLETE.



YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY







THE ZYXOMETER, STILL WORKING IN MY OFFICE, GIVES ME THE NEWS:

THERE'S A SECURITIES HEIST IN PROGRESS AT THE ASTRO CITY STOCK EXCHANGE. A TORNADO THREATENING TOPEKA.

AND AN ARMORED GIANT WITH AN AX DEMANDING TRIBUTE IN CHICAGO.

BUT THE BLACK RAPIER HAS ALREADY DISABLED THE GETAWAY VEHICLES AND IS CONFRONTING THE GANG. CLEOPATRA IS DIVERTING THE TORNADO --

-- AND REX AND NATALIE OF THE FIRST FAMILY ARE ON THEIR WAY TO THE WINDY CITY.

AND I --

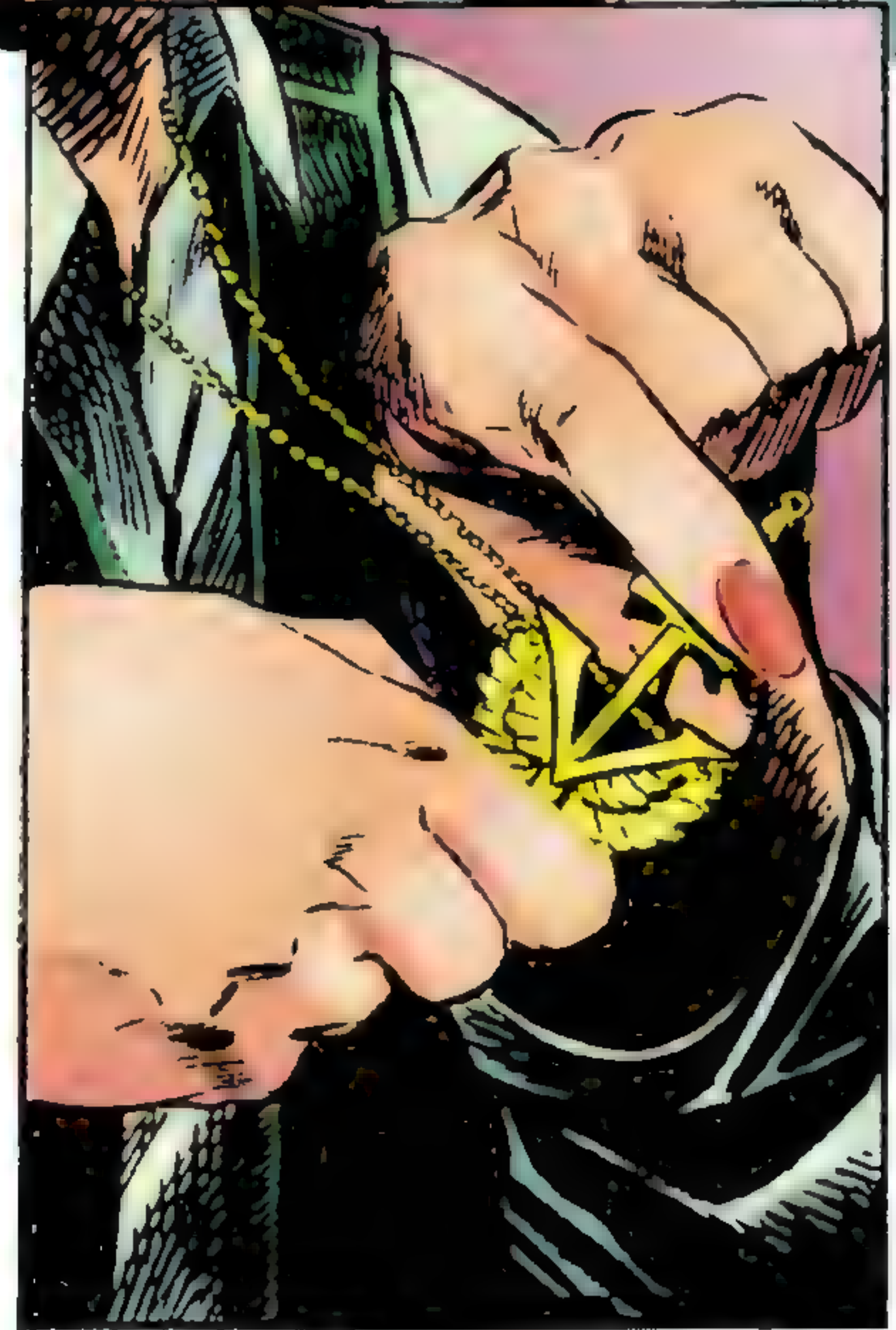
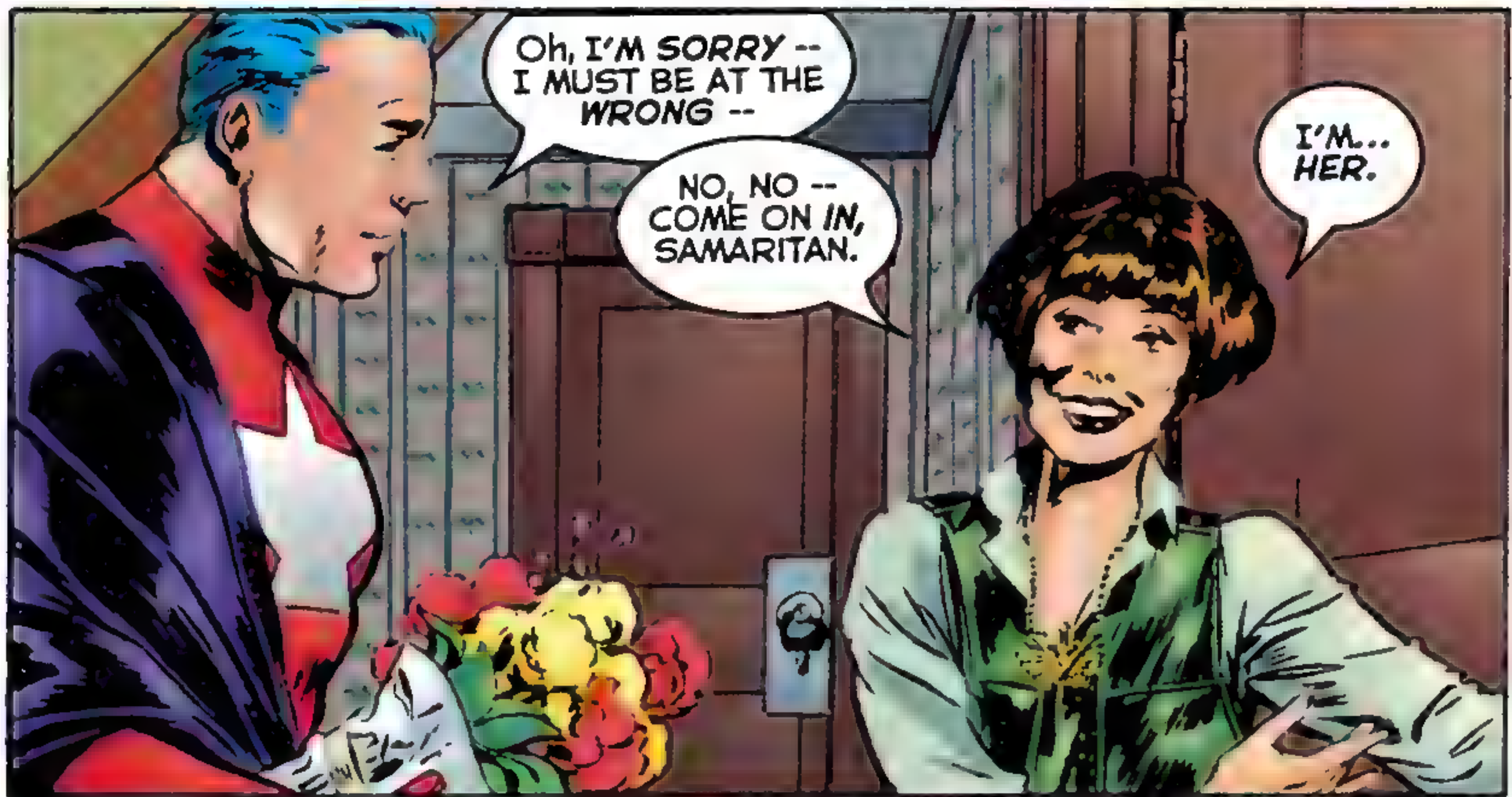
-- I HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH THE LOCK ON THE ROOF DOOR.

I FIND THE APARTMENT WITH NO DIFFICULTY.

AND I WISH --



-- I WISH I WAS HEADED FOR CHICAGO MYSELF.



DINNER AT EIGHT



...LET
ME.

SHE'S
BEAUTIFUL.

SHE'S BEAUTIFUL AND
INTELLIGENT AND BRAVE
AND FORTHRIGHT --
AND I CAN'T STOP MYSELF
FROM THINKING THERE'S
NO POINT TO THIS.

I'M TOO BUSY. I
DON'T HAVE TIME.
IF I DID HAVE TIME
TO ASK SOMEONE
TO DINNER, SHE'D
BE AT THE TOP
OF THE LIST --

BUT AS IT
HAPPENS,
I DIDN'T
EVEN ASK.



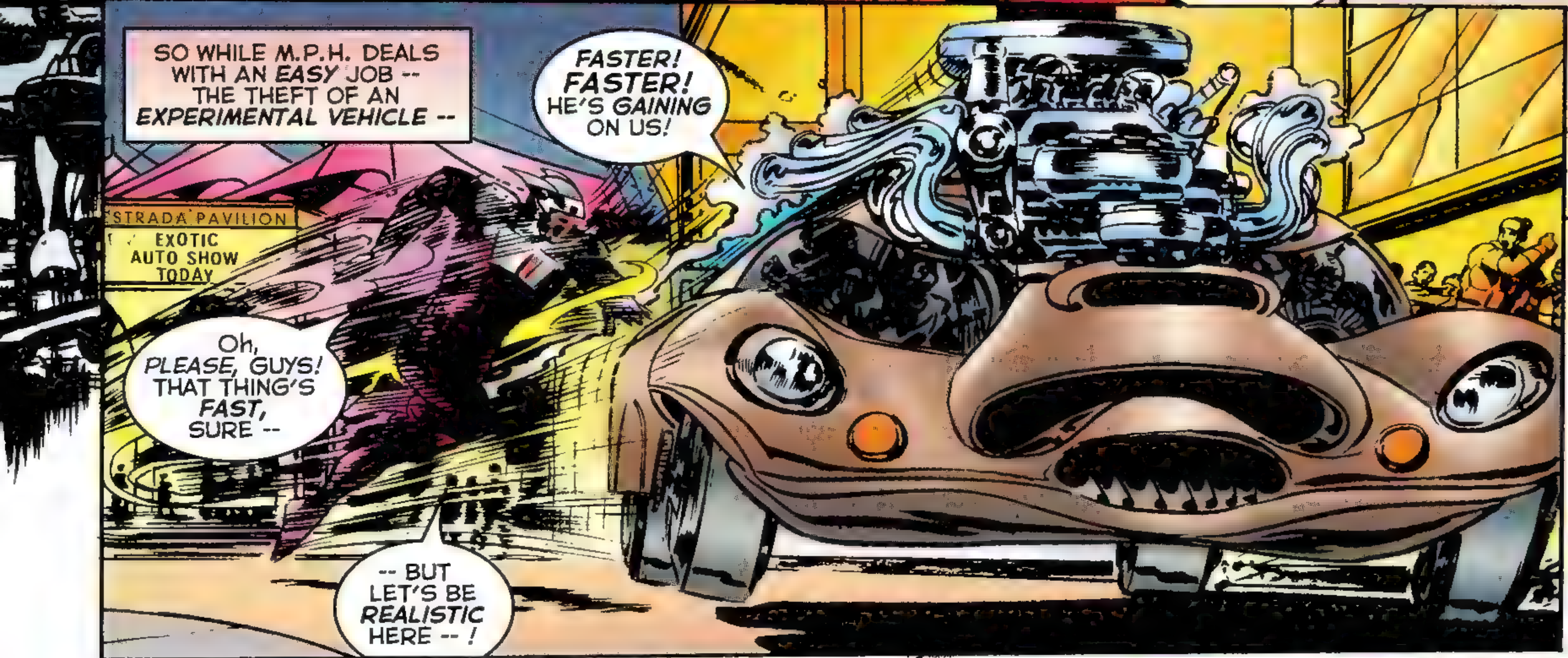
IT WAS A CONSPIRACY,
MORE OR LESS.

NOW WE'RE
NOT GOING TO TAKE
NO FOR AN ANSWER,
BIG GUY. YOU KEEP
OVERWORKING YOURSELF
LIKE THIS, YOU'RE
GOING TO
CRACK. TAKE
AN EVENING
OFF, FOR
ONCE --

-- THE REST
OF US CAN KEEP
THE WORLD SAFE
FOR ONE
NIGHT.

DID YOU
TELL HIM
ABOUT
HIS DATE,
M.P.H.?

Oh,
YEAH -- I
ALMOST
FORGOT TO
MENTION...



SO WHILE M.P.H. DEALS
WITH AN EASY JOB --
THE THEFT OF AN
EXPERIMENTAL VEHICLE --

FASTER!
FASTER!
HE'S GAINING
ON US!

Oh,
PLEASE, GUYS!
THAT THING'S
FAST,
SURE --

-- BUT
LET'S BE
REALISTIC
HERE -- !



-- WINGED VICTORY
AND I GET AN
EMPTY ROOM AND
A BOUQUET
OF FLOWERS...

Ah

Um



THIS IS
PRICELESS,
ISN'T IT?

THE WORLD'S
MOST PROMINENT
SUPERHERO AND
SUPERHEROINE, AND
NEITHER OF US HAS
BEEN OUT ON A
DATE IN SO
LONG --


-- WE'VE
FORGOTTEN
HOW IT
WORKS.



COME ON, LET'S GET OUT OF HERE. I'M GLAD BEAUTIE TALKED ME INTO THIS --

-- BUT THE CLOCK'S TICKING!

IT WAS ONLY A FEW MONTHS AGO THAT WE BATTLED THE IRON HORDE BACK TO BACK, BUT NOW --



-- IT'S LIKE WE DON'T BELONG TOGETHER. NOT WITHOUT A SUPER-VILLAIN.


SO. WHERE TO?

I... DON'T KNOW. I DIDN'T REALLY THINK TO MAKE RESERVATIONS ANYWHERE.


IT'S NOT LIKE WE CAN GO TO DINNER LIKE THIS, RIGHT?

WHAT, YOU THINK WE'LL CAUSE A FUSS?

WELL, LOOK DOWN THERE --



"-- THEY'RE ALREADY WONDERING WHAT THE TWO OF US ARE DOING TOGETHER."



SO THEY ARE. BUT YOU KNOW WHAT?

IT'S OUR NIGHT OFF --



"... LET'S GO AHEAD
AND CAUSE A FUSS!"

HI, WE
DON'T HAVE
A RESERVATION --
BUT WE WERE HOPING
YOU'D BE ABLE TO
SEAT US...

WINGED
VICTORY!
S-SAMARITAN!

I --
ah --

I --

-- RIGHT
THIS WAY,
PLEASE.



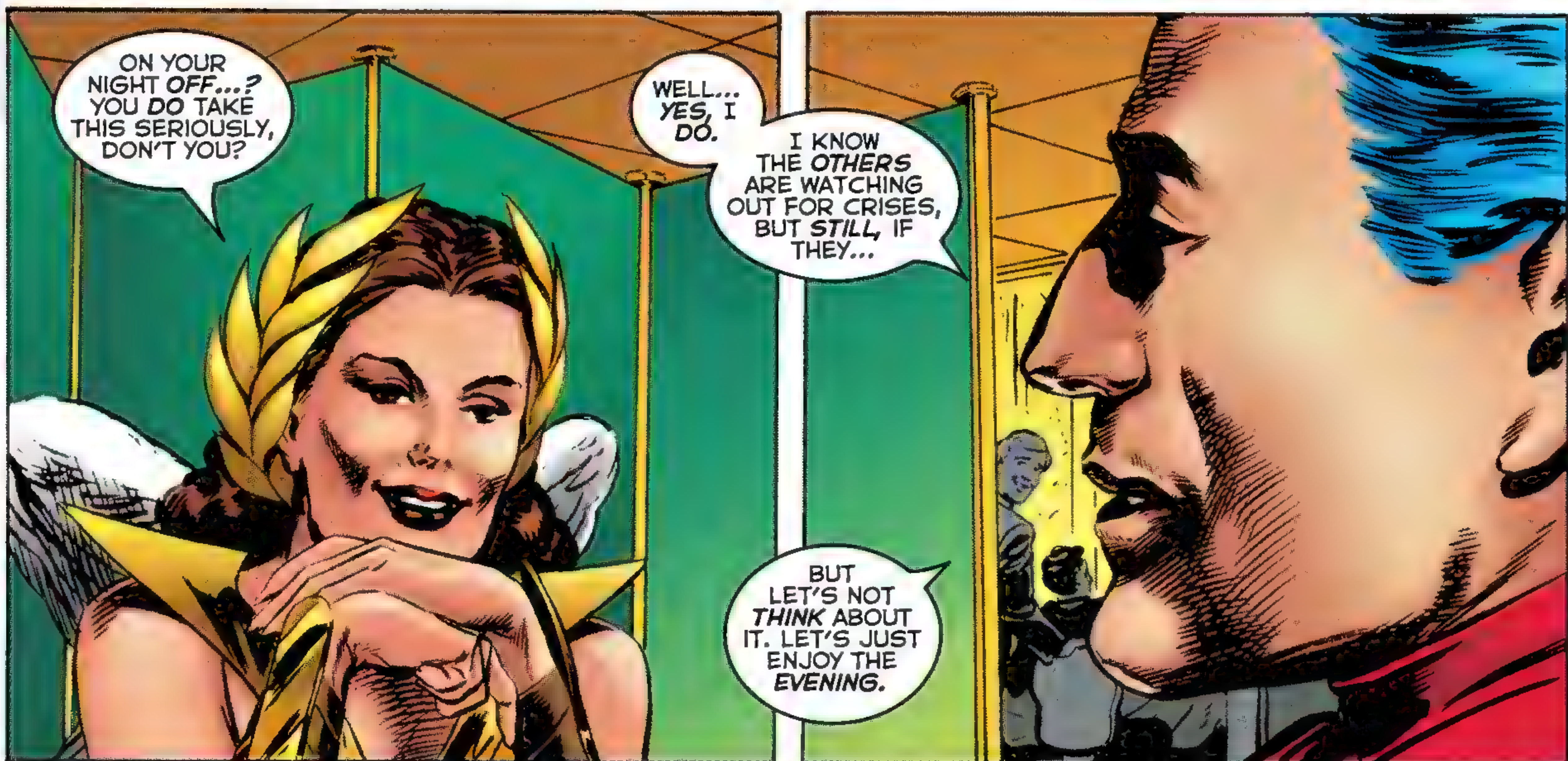
THEY SEAT US BY
THE DANCE FLOOR,
BUT BRING OUT
PRIVACY SCREENS.

AND WOULD MONSIEUR
ET MADEMOISELLE CARE
FOR A DRINK?

EVERY EYE IN THE
PLACE IS ON US AS
THEY PUT THEM UP.

WHITE
WINE FOR
ME.

JUST
CLUB SODA,
THANKS.



ON YOUR
NIGHT OFF...?
YOU DO TAKE
THIS SERIOUSLY,
DON'T YOU?

WELL...
YES, I
DO.

I KNOW
THE OTHERS
ARE WATCHING
OUT FOR CRISES,
BUT STILL, IF
THEY...

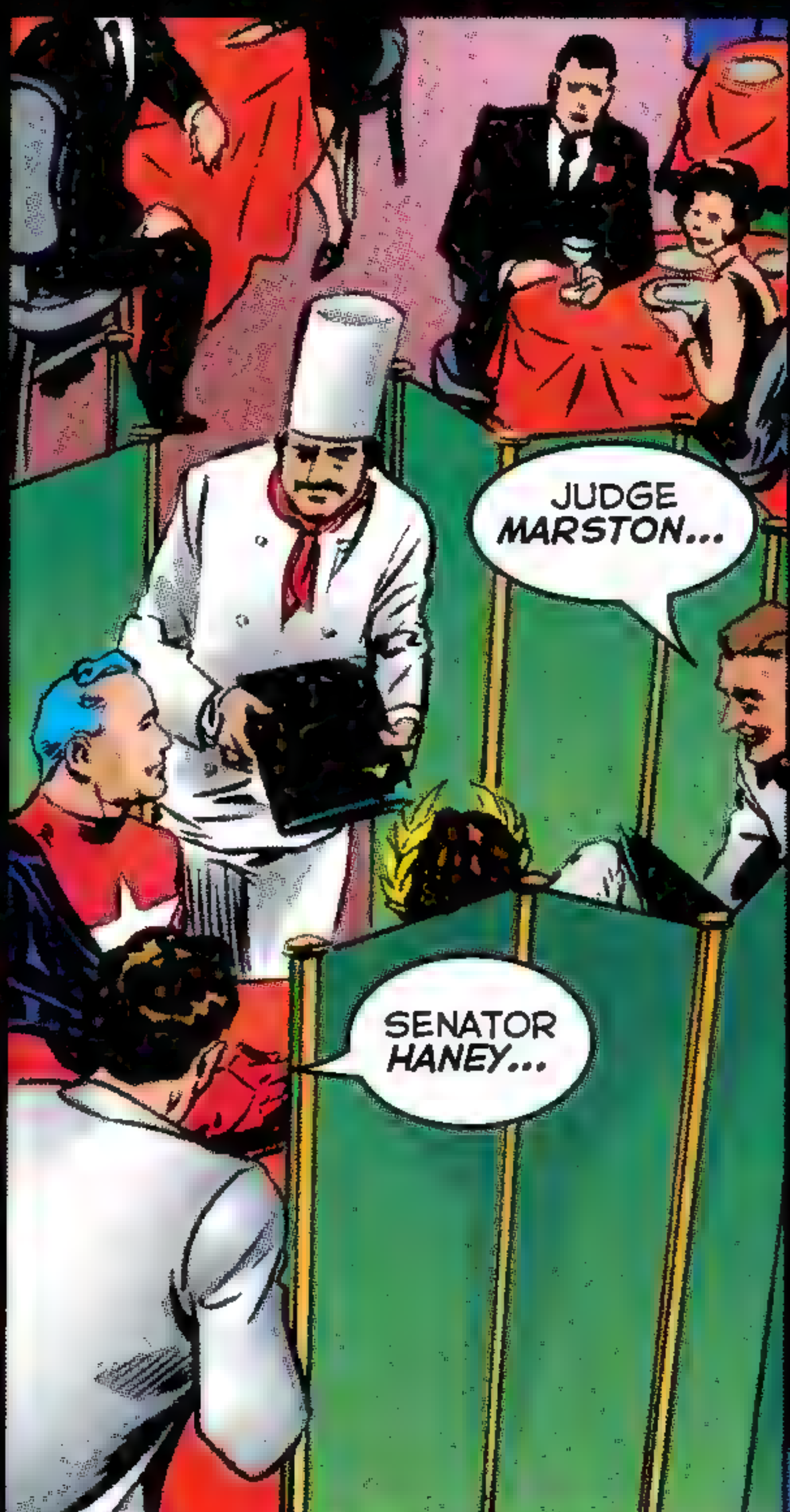
BUT
LET'S NOT
THINK ABOUT
IT. LET'S JUST
ENJOY THE
EVENING.



Ah, SIR?
MADEMOI-
SELLE?

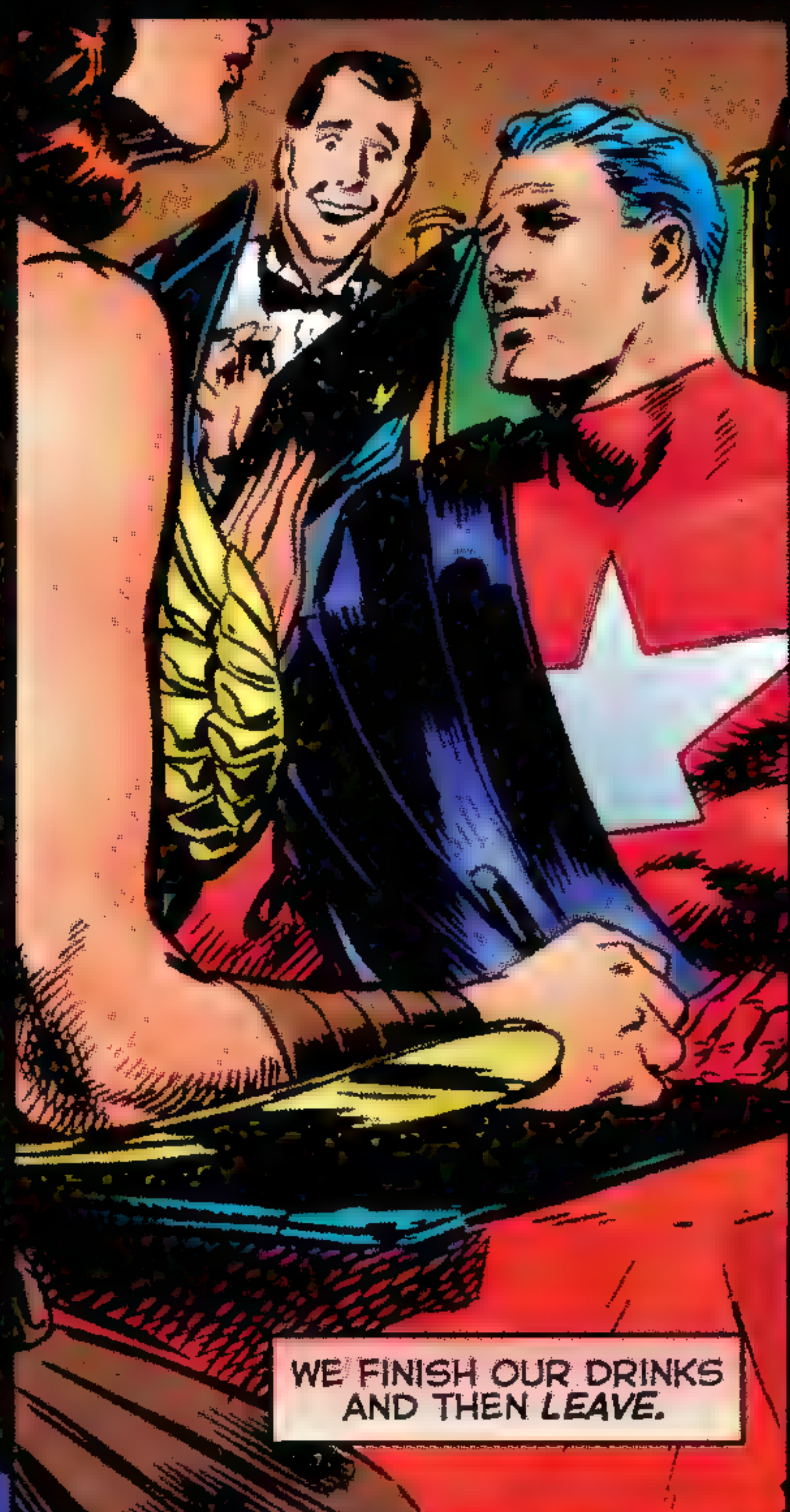
ORDINARILY, WE
DO NOT DISTURB
OUR GUESTS, BUT
THE MAYOR -- HE HAS
ASKED IF YOU'D
SIGN A MENU
FOR HIM..?

THE
MAYOR?
SURE. NO
PROBLEM.



JUDGE
MARSTON...

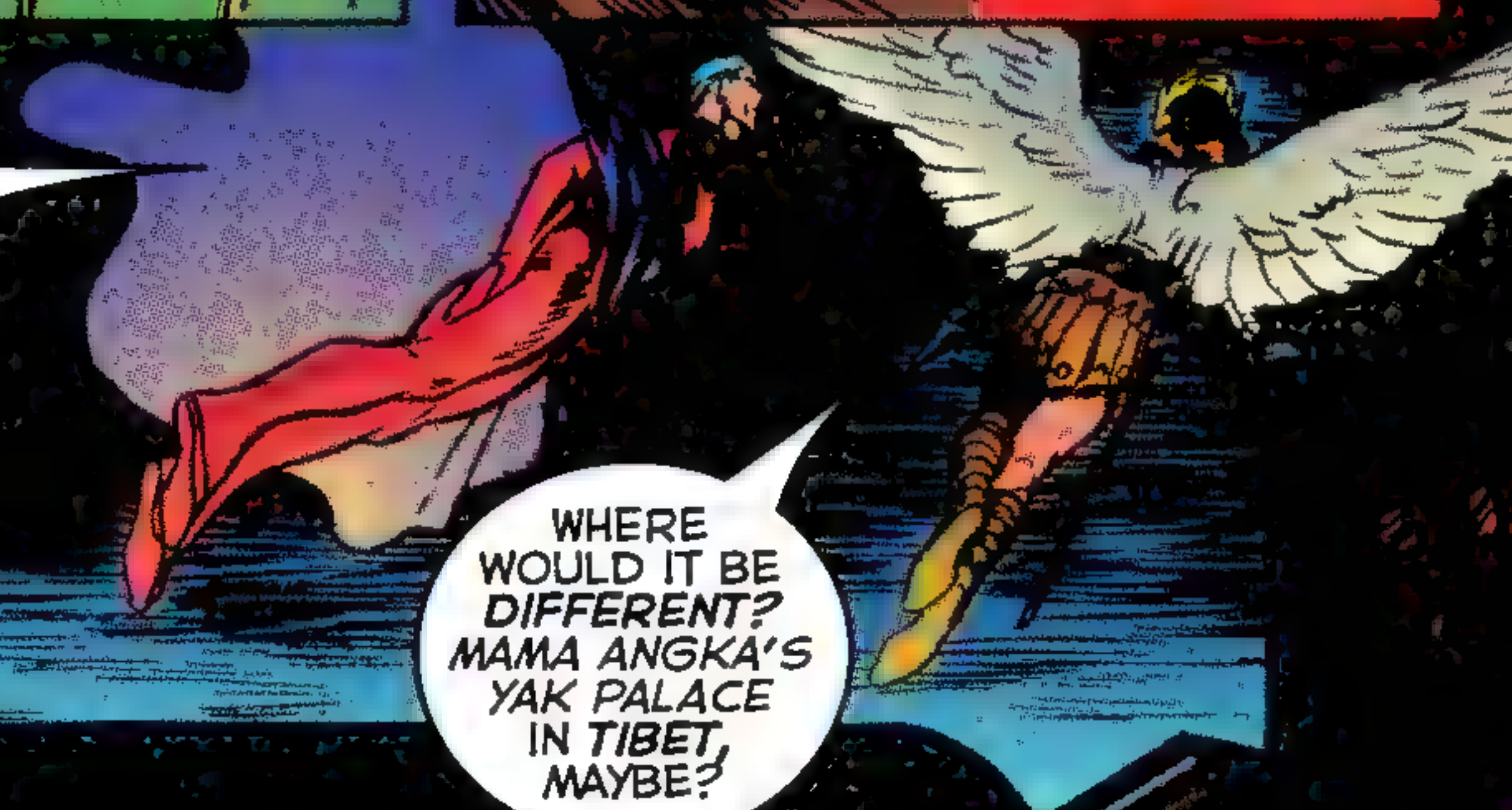
SENATOR
HANEY...



WE FINISH OUR DRINKS
AND THEN LEAVE.



WHERE
NOW? WE COULD
GO TO PARIS... OR
TOKYO, IF YOU'D
RATHER...



WHERE
WOULD IT BE
DIFFERENT?
MAMA ANGKA'S
YAK PALACE
IN TIBET,
MAYBE?

Feinny's

F E I N N Y ' S
E D I N I N G

THERE ARE A
FEW PLACES THAT
CATER TO OUR
COLLEAGUES --

-- BUT THE IDEA IS TO GET
AWAY FROM OUR MISSIONS,
FROM SHOP TALK.



I'VE
GOT AN
IDEA...

PHANTOM
THE OPERA

SO WHILE QUARREL, CRACKERJACK AND THE N-FORCER HANDLE AN AVALANCHE IN MONTANA...

MY IDEA OF A SWELL EVENING, I'LL TELL YOU -- FREEZIN' MY BUNS OFF SO SOME OTHER GUY CAN GET SOME!

SHUT UP, 'JACK!

...WE END UP AT THE BEEFY BOB'S ON STALLMAN STREET.

-- NAME'S ASA MARTIN. I WORK AS A FACT CHECKER FOR CURRENT MAGAZINE -- THE NEWSWEEKLY?

REALLY? UM, NO OFFENSE --

IT'S NOISY AND CROWDED ENOUGH SO THAT NOBODY'S GOING TO BOTHER PAYING ATTENTION TO WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

=UF!=

SORRY.

-- BUT IT'S NOT THE SORT OF THING I'D HAVE IMAGINED FOR YOU.

IT'S... WELL, IT'S NOT MUCH OF A JOB, IS IT?

I DON'T NEED THAT MUCH. THIS LETS ME TAP NEWSFEEDS WITH MY ZYXOMETER -- SORT OF AN ORGANIC COMPUTER --

-- AND I CAN TAKE OFF WHENEVER I NEED TO, AS LONG AS THE WORK GETS DONE...

WELL, YES, BUT SURELY YOU COULD GET WHATEVER CONNECTIONS YOU WANT FROM THE GOVERNMENT --

-- OR FROM ANY T.V. STATION, FOR FREE. KBAC, KACT...

I SUPPOSE I COULD, NOW. BUT I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WHEN I STARTED OUT...

...AND, WELL, I'VE BEEN KIND OF BUSY...

I GUESS
I SHOULD TELL
YOU A LITTLE BIT
ABOUT MYSELF...
WHERE I'M FROM,
AND ALL
THAT.

ACTUALLY,
IT'S MORE
LIKE *WHEN* I'M
FROM...

"I WAS BORN IN THE
35TH CENTURY, AT
A TIME WHEN EARTH
WAS DYING.

"ENVIRONMENTAL
DISASTERS,
RADIATION...

"...THERE WAS BARELY
A GENERATION LEFT
BEFORE MANKIND
WOULD BE EXTINCT.

"A RISKY PLAN WAS
PUT INTO MOTION...

"...TO SEND
SOMEONE
BACK INTO TIME TO
STOP THE EVENT THAT
TRIGGERED ALL THIS.

"I NEVER KNEW THAT
MUCH ABOUT THE
MECHANICS OF IT --
MY TRAINING WAS
LARGELY HISTORICAL.

"AFTER TWO YEARS OF
PREPARATION, THEY
HAD THE PROCESS
READY --

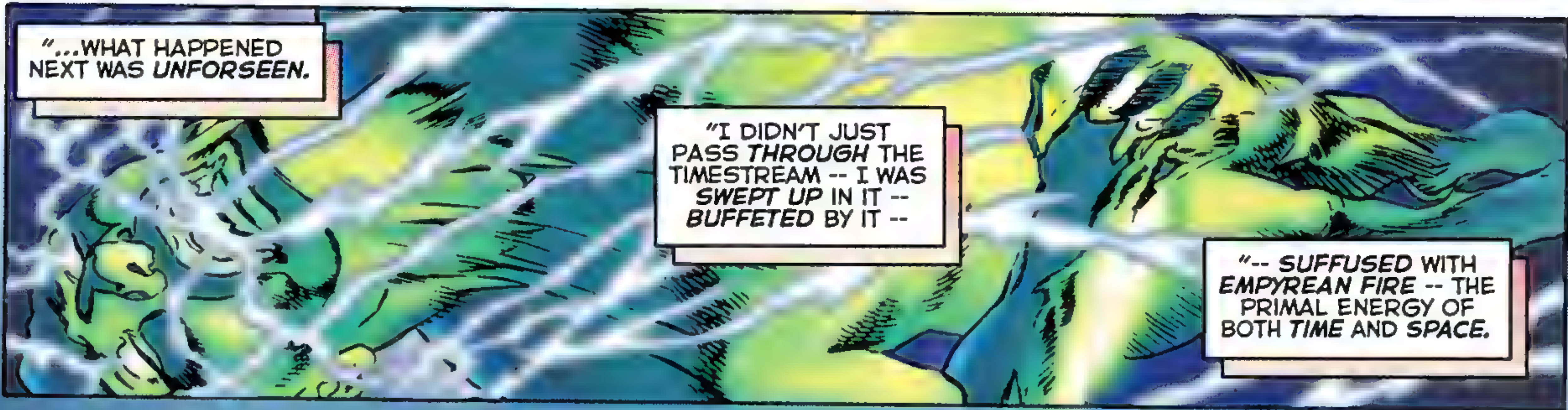
"I SAID GOOD-BYE
TO MY FAMILY --

"I PASSED THE
TESTS, AND WAS
CHOSEN TO GO.

"THEY DID TEACH ME ENOUGH
TO REPAIR MY ZYXOMETER,
SHOULD IT MALFUNCTION --
BUT THAT WAS ABOUT IT.

"-- AND WAS
HURLED BACKWARD
THROUGH TIME.

"WHAT HAPPENED
NEXT...



"...WHAT HAPPENED NEXT WAS UNFORSEEN.

"I DIDN'T JUST PASS THROUGH THE TIMESTREAM -- I WAS SWEEPED UP IN IT -- BUFFETED BY IT --

"-- SUFFUSED WITH EMPYREAN FIRE -- THE PRIMAL ENERGY OF BOTH TIME AND SPACE.



"I ARRIVED IN LATE 1985 TRANSFORMED. I WAS SEETHING WITH ENERGY, BURSTING WITH STRENGTH. MY HAIR WAS A BRIGHT BLUE...

"...AND I WAS HOPELESSLY OVERWHELMED.



"THE PLAN HAD BEEN FOR ME TO CHANGE EVENTS FROM WITHIN -- TO INFILTRATE THE SOCIETY OF THE TIME AS AN UNDERCOVER AGENT.

"INSTEAD, I SPENT THE NEXT WEEKS DESPERATELY WORKING TO CONTROL MY NEW BODY AND ITS ABILITIES, AND HOPING I WOULDN'T RUN OUT OF TIME.

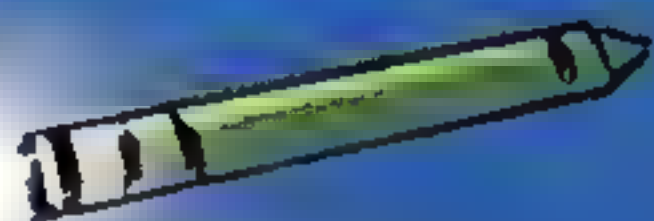


"I VERY NEARLY DID.

BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP
BIP

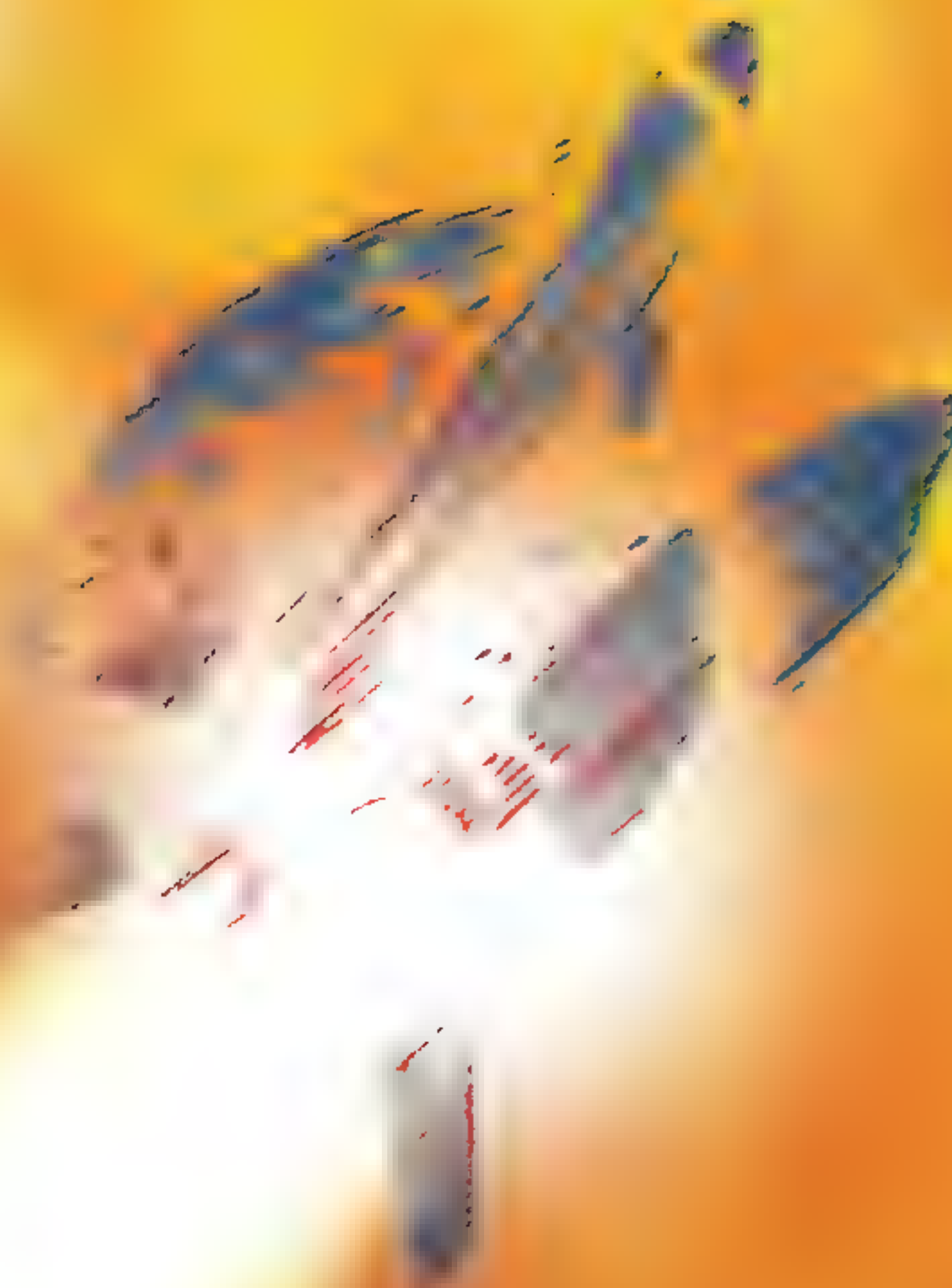
"ON JANUARY 28, 1986, THE EVENT I'D BEEN SENT TO AVERT HAPPENED: A SEALING RING MALFUNCTIONED DURING THE LAUNCH OF THE SPACE SHUTTLE CHALLENGER.

"AS A RESULT, A SOLID ROCKET BOOSTER **BROKE FREE**, CAUSING THE EXTERNAL FUEL TANK TO **EXPLODE**. THE SHIP **BROKE UP**, CRASHED INTO THE OCEAN --



"-- AND EVERYONE ABOARD WAS KILLED.

"OR THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN --



"-- IF I HADN'T THROWN AN *EMPYREAN WEB* AROUND THE SHUTTLE AT THE LAST MOMENT --

"-- PROTECTING THE *CREW COMPARTMENT* FROM THE BLAST, AND PREVENTING THE CRAFT FROM *BREAKING APART*.

"IT WAS THE ONLY SOLUTION I COULD *THINK* OF, GIVEN THE *SECONDS* I HAD TO ACT --

"-- AND THE REACTION WAS MORE THAN I WAS PREPARED FOR..."

SIR! SIR!

ARE YOU A NEW SUPERHERO? WILL YOU BE JOINING HONOR GUARD?

HOW DID YOU KNOW THERE'D BE A DISASTER? WAS IT AN ATTACK?

THIS WAY, SIR! WHAT'S YOUR NAME?!

PLEASE... I'M NOT THAT IMPORTANT. JUST...

...JUST CALL ME A GOOD SAMARITAN...

SIR! OVER HERE!

I TAPPED INTO VARIOUS COMPUTER SYSTEMS, CREATED A DATA TRAIL --

-- USED MY POWER TO LEACH THE *BLUE* OUT OF MY HAIR, AND GOT A JOB WHERE I COULD INTERACT WITH SOCIETY --

-- WHERE I COULD BUILD MYSELF A LIFE.

SO COME ON, DON'T STOP THERE...

...THEN WHAT HAPPENED?

THAT WAS IT. THAT WAS THE END OF MY MISSION.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT CHANGED -- MAYBE ONE OF THE CHALLENGER SEVEN BECAME A WORLD LEADER, OR HAD AN INFLUENTIAL CHILD --

-- BUT THAT WAS THE CRUCIAL EVENT. THAT SAVED THE WORLD.

AND YOU STILL STAYED SAMARITAN -- EVEN THOUGH YOUR JOB WAS DONE?

WELL, THIS IS WHAT I'M TRAINED FOR, MORE OR LESS --

-- AND I CAN'T HELP BUT THINK, IF ONE CHANGE COULD DO THAT, IF ONE DISASTER COULD SEND THE WORLD INTO RUIN --

-- WELL, HAVING SEEN WHERE WE COULD END UP, I FEEL LIKE I SHOULD TRY TO KEEP THINGS AS SAFE AS I CAN.

"I DID GET BACK TO THE 35TH CENTURY ONCE, AFTER A BATTLE WITH ETERNEON --

-- AND IT WAS GREEN AND LUSH AND HEALTHY -- MY MISSION HAD BEEN A SUCCESS.

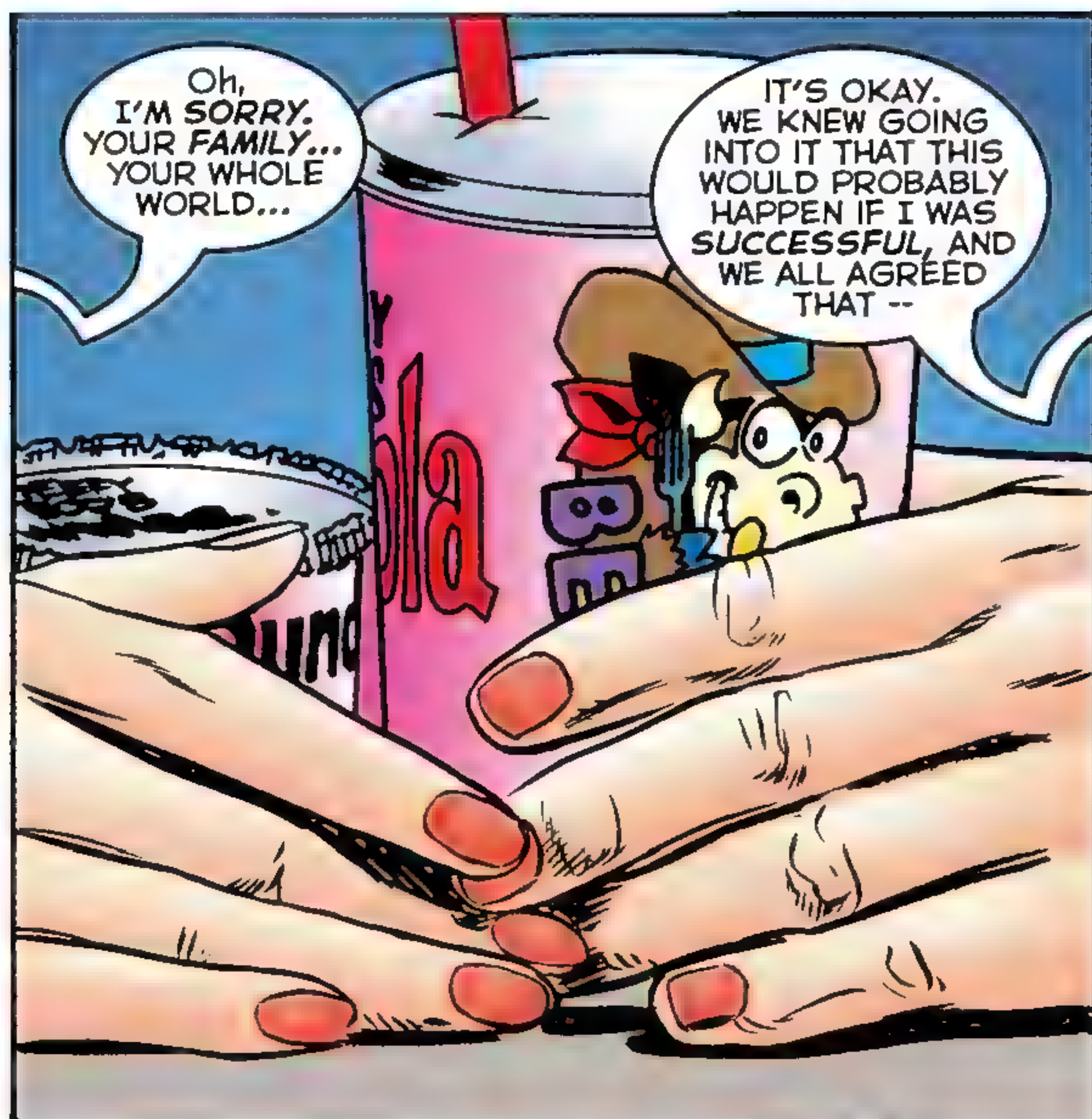
"BUT I COULDN'T FIND MY FAMILY. THEY DIDN'T EXIST -- THEY'D NEVER BEEN BORN.

"THE DWELLING UNIT WHERE I GREW UP WAS GONE, TOO. IN ITS PLACE WAS AN AUTOMATED TACO STAND.

"HOW MY TIME-TRIP LETS ME EXIST WITHOUT ANY PARENTS, I DON'T KNOW --

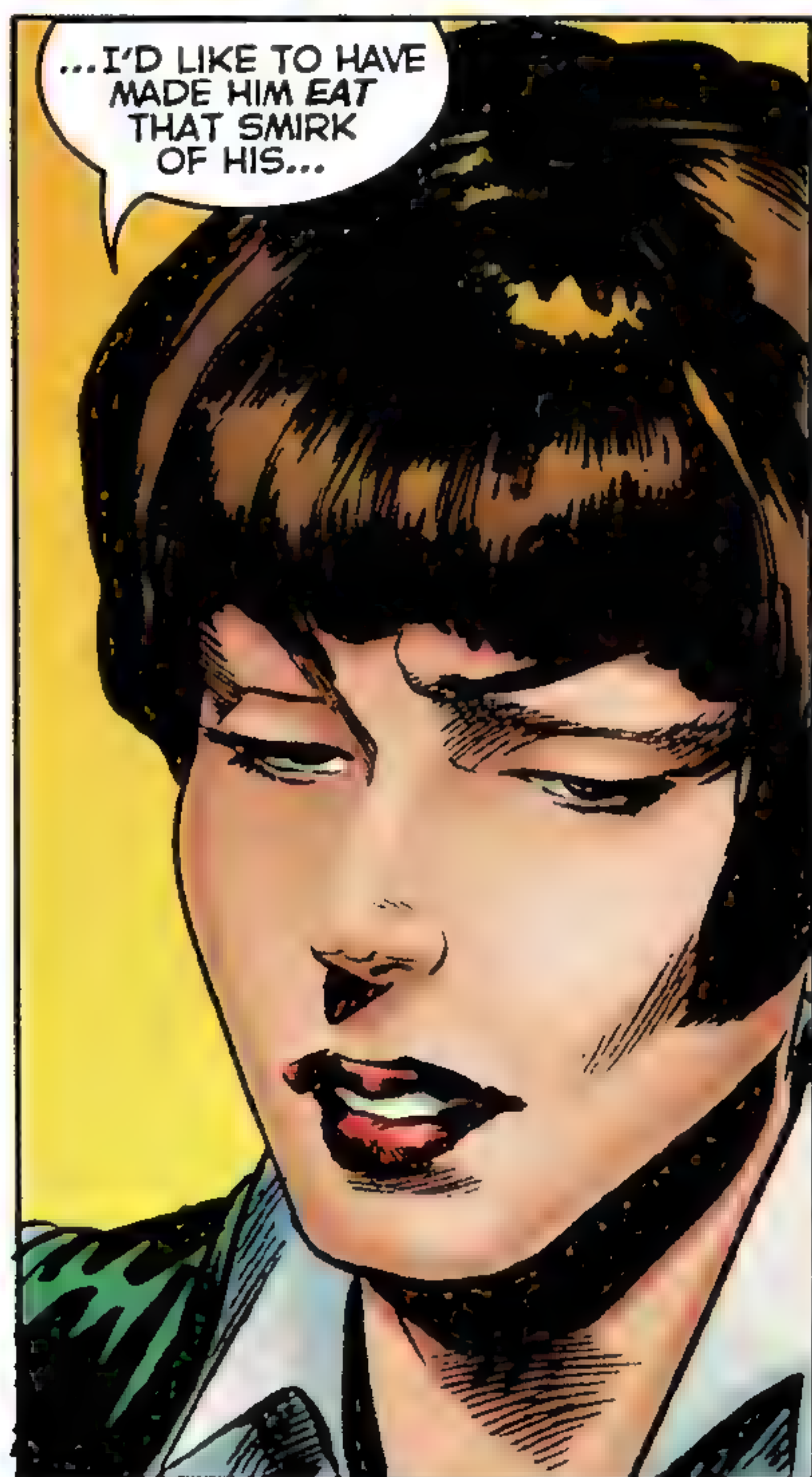
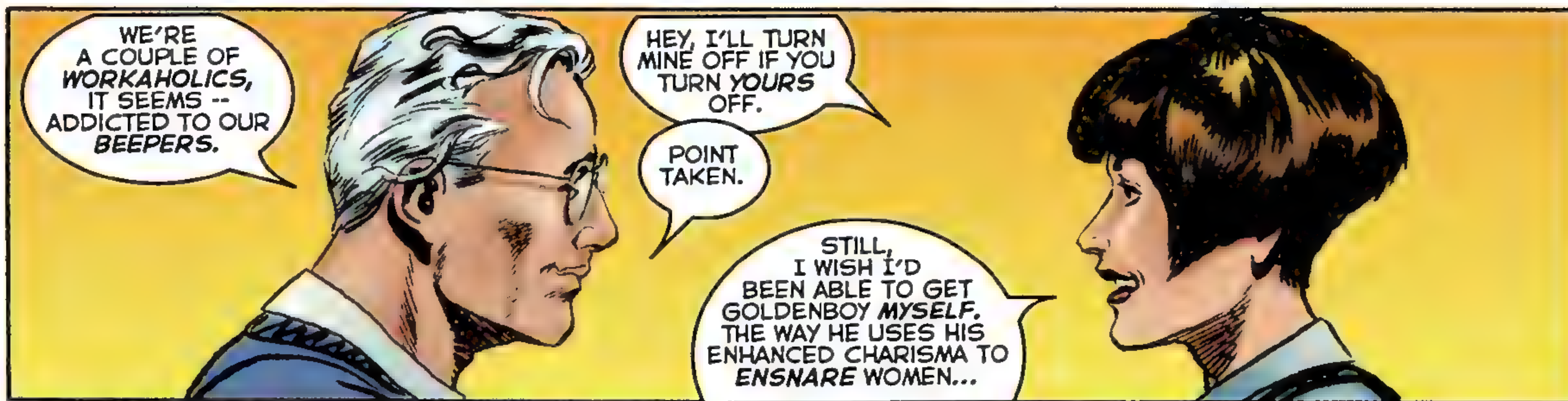
-- BUT THE WORLD I CAME FROM IS GONE. IT SIMPLY NEVER WAS."

Arriola's Taco Cal



AND IN SAN FRANCISCO --





AND AS
WE TALK
ABOUT IT --

BRATTATA

TANG
TANG
TANG

BECAUSE I'VE
GOT A MESSAGE
TO SEND, TO WOMEN.
NOT JUST THAT THEY
CAN BE HEROIC, BUT
THAT THEY MATTER.
THEY COUNT.

THAT'S
WHY I'VE NEVER
JOINED HONOR
GUARD --

-- SO MY
ACCOMPLISHMENTS
WILL BE SEEN AS A
WOMAN'S ACCOMP-
LISHMENTS, NOT JUST
PART OF WHAT A
TEAM DOES.

STILL,
IT'S JUST AS
HEROIC FOR A
WOMAN TO SAVE
MEN, IF THEY
NEED IT...

SURE,
AND I DO
THAT.

BUT I
WAS GRANTED
THESE POWERS
FOR A REASON --
TO INSPIRE WOMEN.
I THINK THAT'S
PERFECTLY
LEGITIMATE.

Oh, SO
IF YOU DON'T
FAVOR WOMEN,
YOU'D LOSE YOUR
POWERS? I CAN
UNDERSTAND
THAT...

NO,
IT'S --
NO!

-- THE
OTHERS
DO IT --

GOT
YOU!

-- STRAINING TO BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE -- CALLING IN REINFORCEMENTS --

-- DOING OUR JOB ALONG WITH THEIR OWN --

LOOK, I DO WHAT I DO BY CHOICE, AND SO DO YOU. YOU PRIORITIZE BY TIME, BY WHO'S NEAREST --

-- AND I PRIORITIZE BY SEX, BY WHAT MESSAGE I SEND.

WE'RE STILL CHOOSING TO SAVE LIVES --

-- BUT WE CAN'T SAVE EVERYBODY, AND THERE'S MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF US TO DO.

RIGHT?

Ah, RIGHT.

SO YOU'RE CHOOSING TO SEND A MESSAGE, WHEN POSSIBLE. I CAN SEE THAT.

I GUESS I THOUGHT YOU DID THAT MOSTLY WITH THE SHELTERS YOU RUN. YOU'VE GOT WHAT, A DOZEN OF THEM NOW?

-- WHILE WE SIT HALF-DISTRACTED, TRYING TO TELL OURSELVES WE CAN RELAX --

-- ASSURING OURSELVES WE DON'T NEED TO BE THERE...

NICK! I NEED A SAMPLE OF THAT ENERGY! TRAP A POCKET OF IT, AND BRING IT TO ME!

GOT IT, DAD! WILL DO!

AAH!



FOURTEEN.
BUT THEY'RE NOT
SHELTERS, THEY'RE
SCHOOLS.

WE
STARTED
THEM AS
SHELTERS --

-- BUT I
REALIZED THE
WOMEN THERE
WERE GROWING
DEPENDENT ON ME,
LOOKING TO ME FOR
PROTECTION, AND
I DIDN'T WANT
THAT.

"SO WE TURNED
THEM INTO SCHOOLS.
NOBODY LIVES THERE
BUT STAFF.

"WHAT WE TEACH
WOMEN -- GIRLS,
TEENAGERS,
ADULTS -- STARTS
WITH SELF-
DEFENSE --

"-- BUT IT'S THE
'SELF' PART THAT'S
MOST IMPORTANT.
WE'RE ABOUT
CONFIDENCE, NOT
HIDING.

"I DON'T SAY THIS TO RUN DOWN
SHELTERS -- THERE ARE PLENTY
OF SHELTERS
DOING GOOD AND
NEEDED WORK --

"-- BUT IF I STAND FOR
ANYTHING, IT'S THE IDEA
THAT WOMEN SHOULD
FOCUS ON STRENGTH,
NOT WEAKNESS.



THAT SEEMS TO
BE AN IDEA THAT
SOME PEOPLE FIND
CONTROVER-
SIAL...

TELL ME ABOUT IT.
I'VE BEEN CALLED
EVERYTHING FROM A
PAGAN CULT-LEADER
TO AN ANTI-
AMERICAN LESBIAN
TERRORIST.

HOW
DO YOU
COPE WITH
IT?

I JUST
TRY TO FOCUS
ON THE MISSION, ON
GETTING THROUGH
TO THE NEXT JOB
THAT NEEDS
DOING.



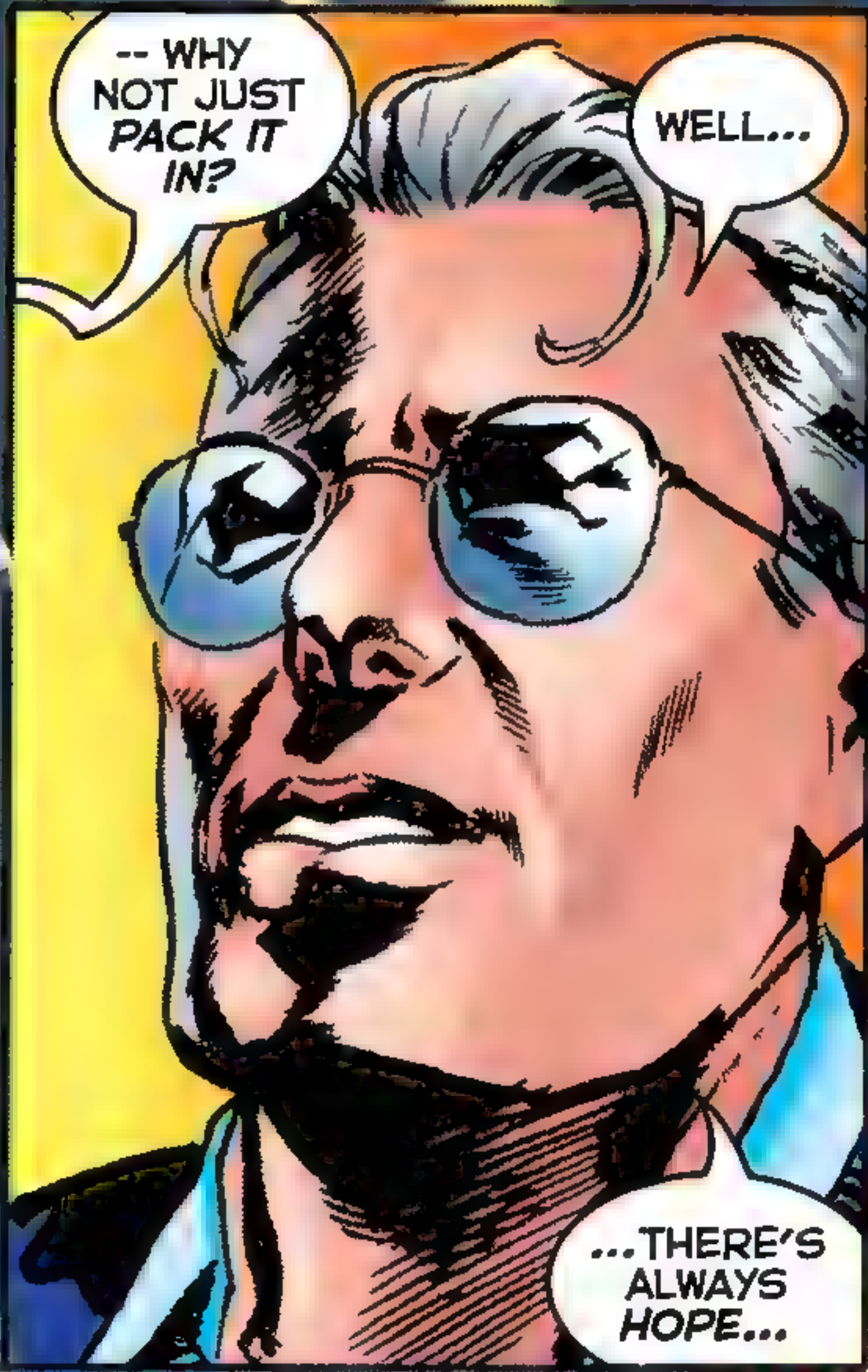
I THINK
IF I STEPPED
BACK AND LOOKED
AT IT FROM OUTSIDE,
I'D JUST CRACK FROM
THE ENORMITY
OF IT ALL.





Oh, **COME ON!** I DON'T HAVE THE **LUXURY** YOU DO, KEEPING A SECRET IDENTITY YOU DON'T EVEN **USE!**

I MEAN, WHERE **IS** THIS NORMAL LIFE YOU SAY YOU WANT? YOU'RE ALWAYS ON THE GO, YOU BARELY EVEN HAVE TIME FOR **TONIGHT --**



-- WHY NOT JUST **PACK IT IN?**

WELL...

...THERE'S ALWAYS **HOPE...**



BUT DON'T YOU SEE HOW **UNREALISTIC** THAT IS?

EVERYTHING WE DO IS **UNREALISTIC.** WE'RE FIGHTING FOR **DREAMS,** AND WE CAN'T **GIVE UP,** NOT EVEN WHEN...

...MAYBE **ESPECIALLY** WHEN IT'S **IMPOSSIBLE.**



MAYBE YOU'RE **FINE --** MAYBE YOU'RE STILL THE WOMAN YOU WERE, JUST MORE **POWERFUL AND EFFECTIVE --**

-- BUT IT SEEMS TO ME THAT, WELL, IF YOU DON'T DEAL WITH THE WORLD THROUGH ANYTHING BUT THE **COSTUME** AND THE **MISSION --**



HOLD IT TOGETHER,, **ASTRA!** HOLD IT TOGETHER...

NOW... **HIT IT! HIT IT HARD!**



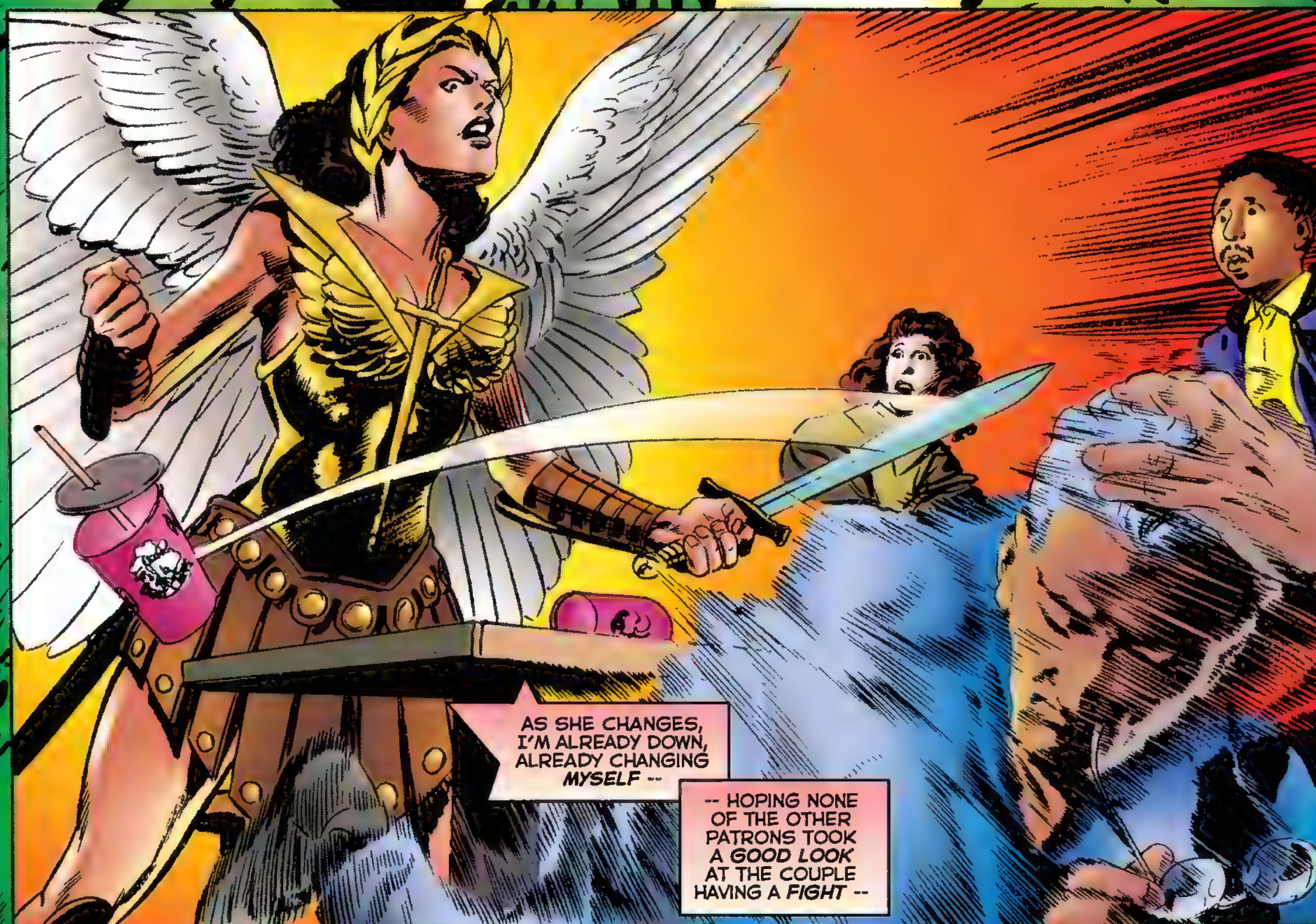
-- HASN'T **WINGED VICTORY** BECOME A KIND OF **SHELTER HERSELF -- ?**



ENOUGH!
ENOUGH OF
THIS PLACE -- !

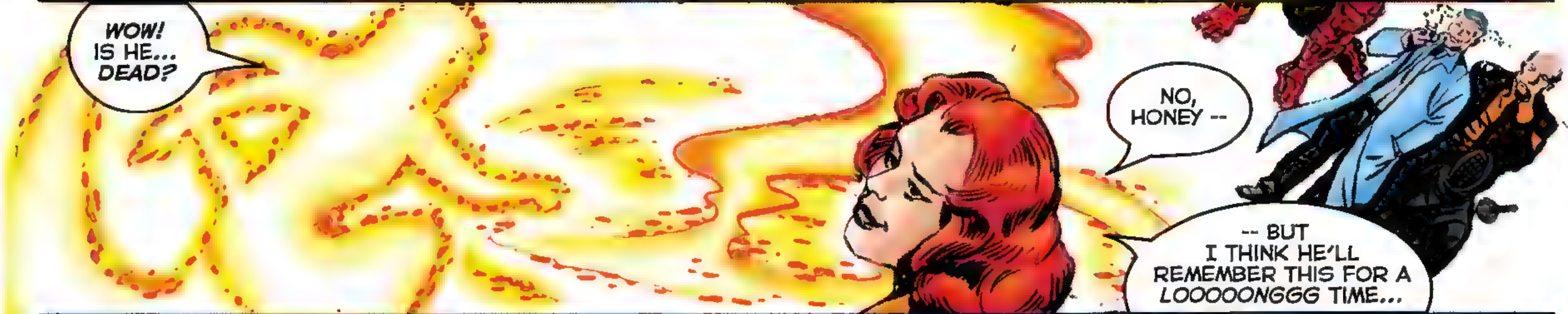
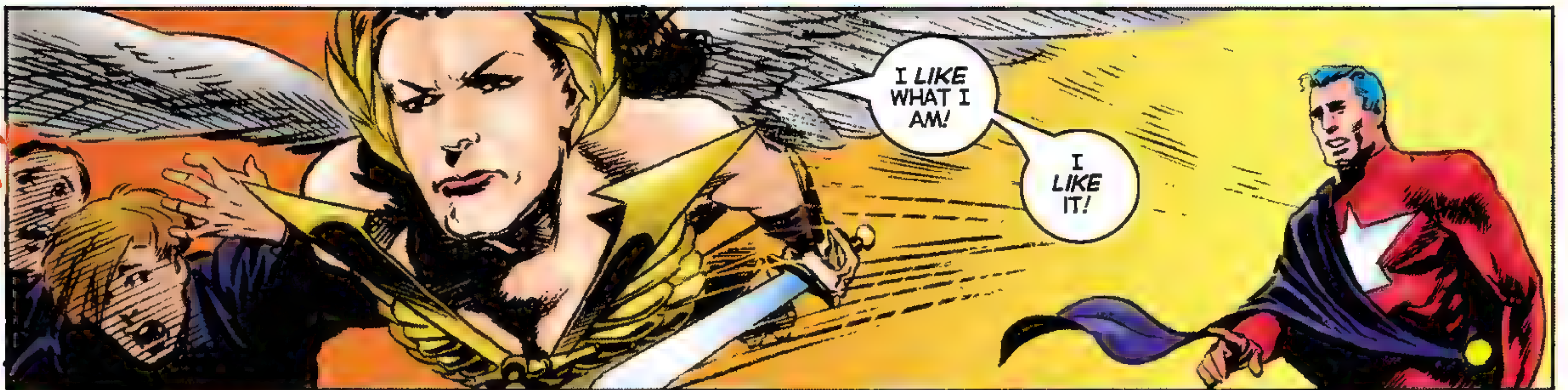


AND
HE'S OUTTA
HERE!



AS SHE CHANGES,
I'M ALREADY DOWN,
ALREADY CHANGING
MYSELF --

-- HOPING NONE
OF THE OTHER
PATRONS TOOK
A GOOD LOOK
AT THE COUPLE
HAVING A FIGHT --



-- AND I
CATCH UP TO
HER AT THE
ASTROBANK
TOWER --

YOU'RE
REALLY ANNOYING,
YOU KNOW
THAT?

LOOK,
I'M --

I
DIDN'T
MEAN
TO --

JUST...BE
QUIET FOR A
SECOND, OKAY?

IT'S LIKE --
LIKE YOU'RE A
GOD, PRETENDING
TO BE NORMAL. I'M
A NORMAL WOMAN
TRYING TO LIVE UP
TO THE ROLE OF
A GOD.

LETTING
GO OF THAT...
EVEN FOR JUST
A LITTLE
WHILE...

...WELL,
IT'S HARD TO
BELIEVE I'LL
EVER CAPTURE
IT AGAIN.

I --
I GUESS I
NEVER LOOKED
AT IT THAT
WAY.

DON'T
WORRY ABOUT
IT. YOU'VE
GIVEN ME A
LOT TO THINK
ABOUT.

JUST
AS LONG AS
IT HASN'T BEEN
ENTIRELY ONE-
SIDED...

NO,
NO -- YOU
SAID SOME
THINGS I HAVEN'T
CONSIDERED,
BUT MAYBE I
SHOULD...



LISTEN.

WHAT -- ?

NOTHING.

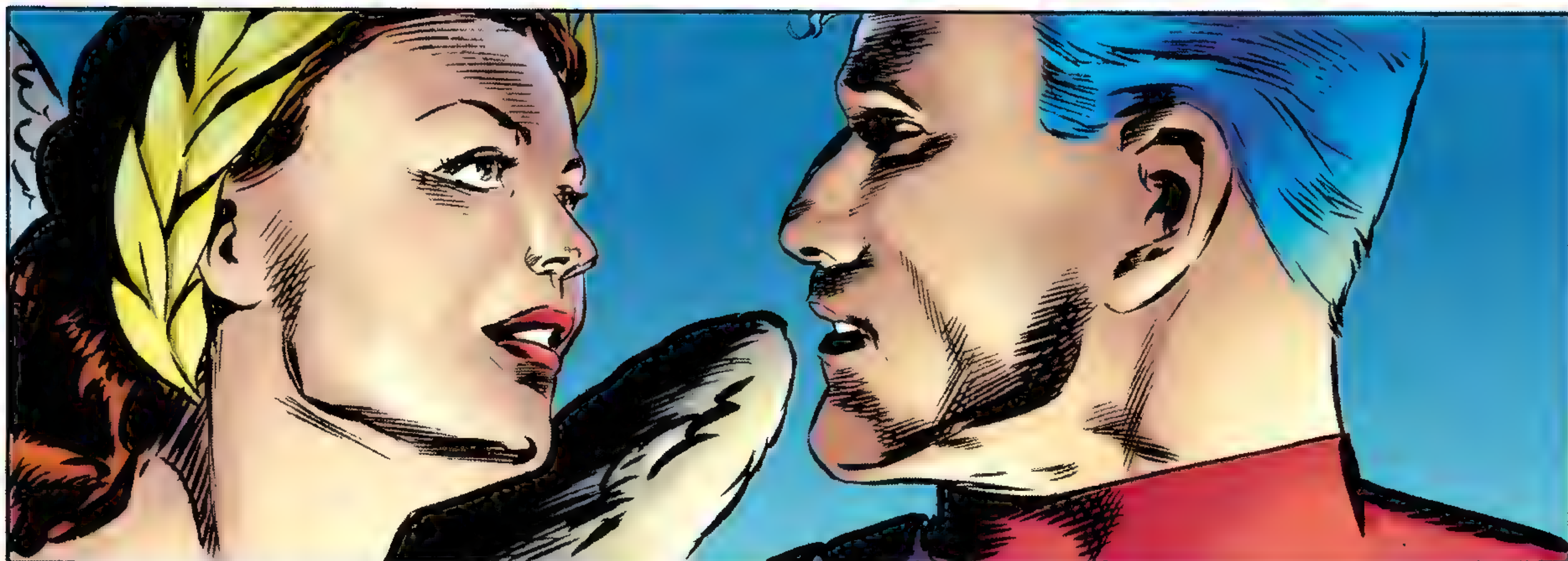
NO
GUNSHOTS.
NO SCREAMS. NO
EXPLOSIONS.

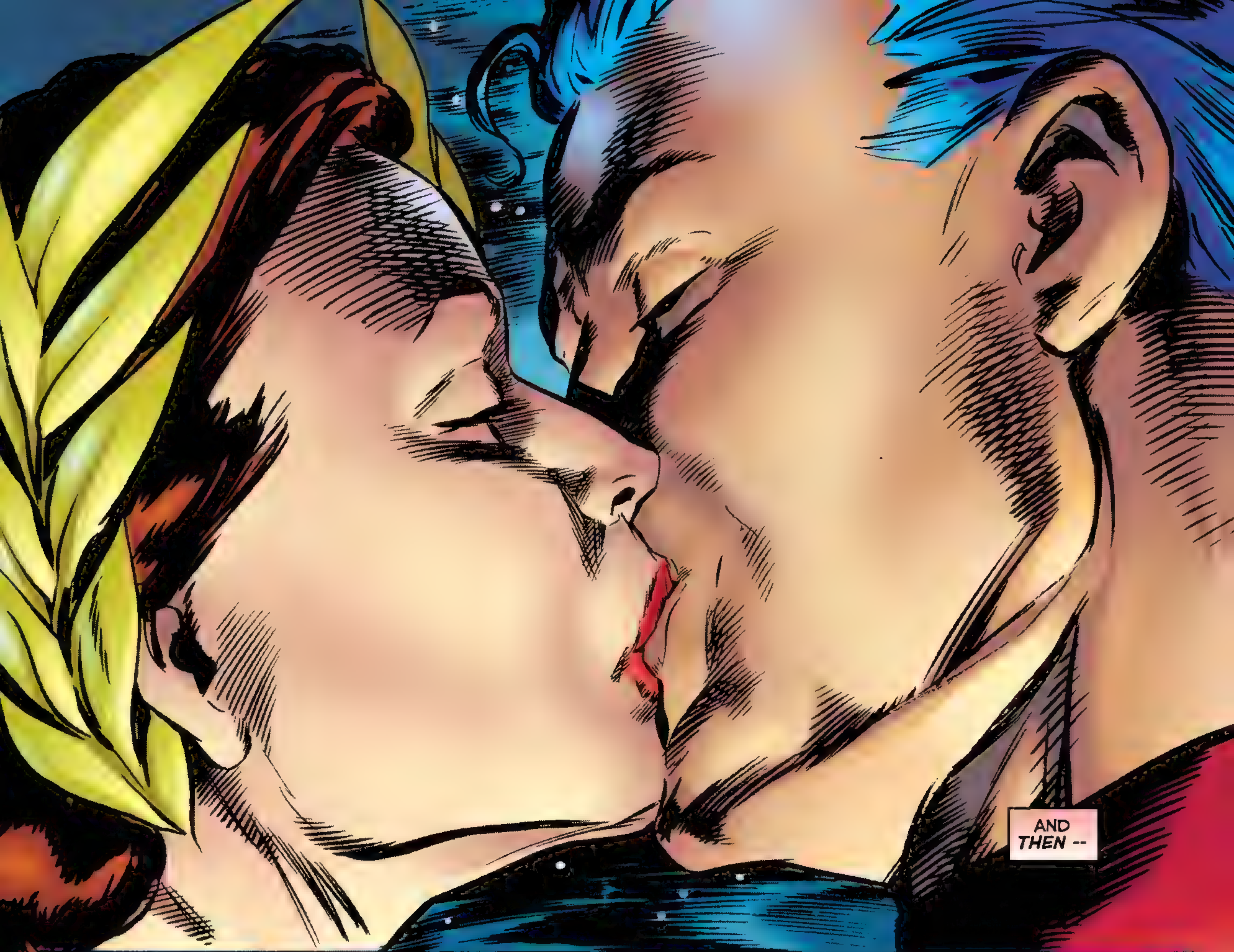
NO
AVALANCHES,
NO SCREECHING
TIRES, NO DEATH
RAYS, NO ALIEN
ATTACKERS.
JUST...

...JUST A
MOMENT OF
PEACE AND
QUIET.

AND IT'S MIDNIGHT,
AND THE OTHERS ARE
GOING HOME, WEARY
BUT VICTORIOUS --

-- AND WE HEAR
BELLS, CHIMING
THE HOUR, ALL
OVER THE CITY --





AND
THEN --



-- AND THEN A
SILENT ALARM
GOES OFF AT A
TOP-SECURITY
LAB IN PALO
ALTO --

LOOK,
I'VE GOT
TO --

YEAH, I
SHOULD DEAL
WITH THIS -- THIS
THING HAPPENING
NEAR SEKOWSKY
STREET --



AND JUST BEFORE
I'M OUT OF RANGE,
I HEAR HER LAUGH
QUIETLY TO HERSELF,
AND WHISPER,
"THERE'S ALWAYS
HOPE."

"THERE'S
ALWAYS
HOPE."



WELL,
THERE IS.

YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY



7



THE SUN'S OUT, AND THERE'S A BREEZE, AND WE DON'T BOTHER TO UNPACK, WE JUST GET OUTSIDE.

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT A NEW CITY -- SOMETHING CLEAN, THAT WASHES AWAY GRIME AND OLD MEMORIES --

I WAS BORN HERE, MAN. WOULDN'T LIVE ANYWHERE ELSE FOR A MILLION BUCKS.

I WENT TO COLLEGE HERE AT FOX-BROOME. AND THE MINUTE I SAW THE CITY, I KNEW IT WAS HOME.

I GUESS IT WAS LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT.

SORRY, I'M IN A HURRY. I DON'T HAVE TIME TO TALK.

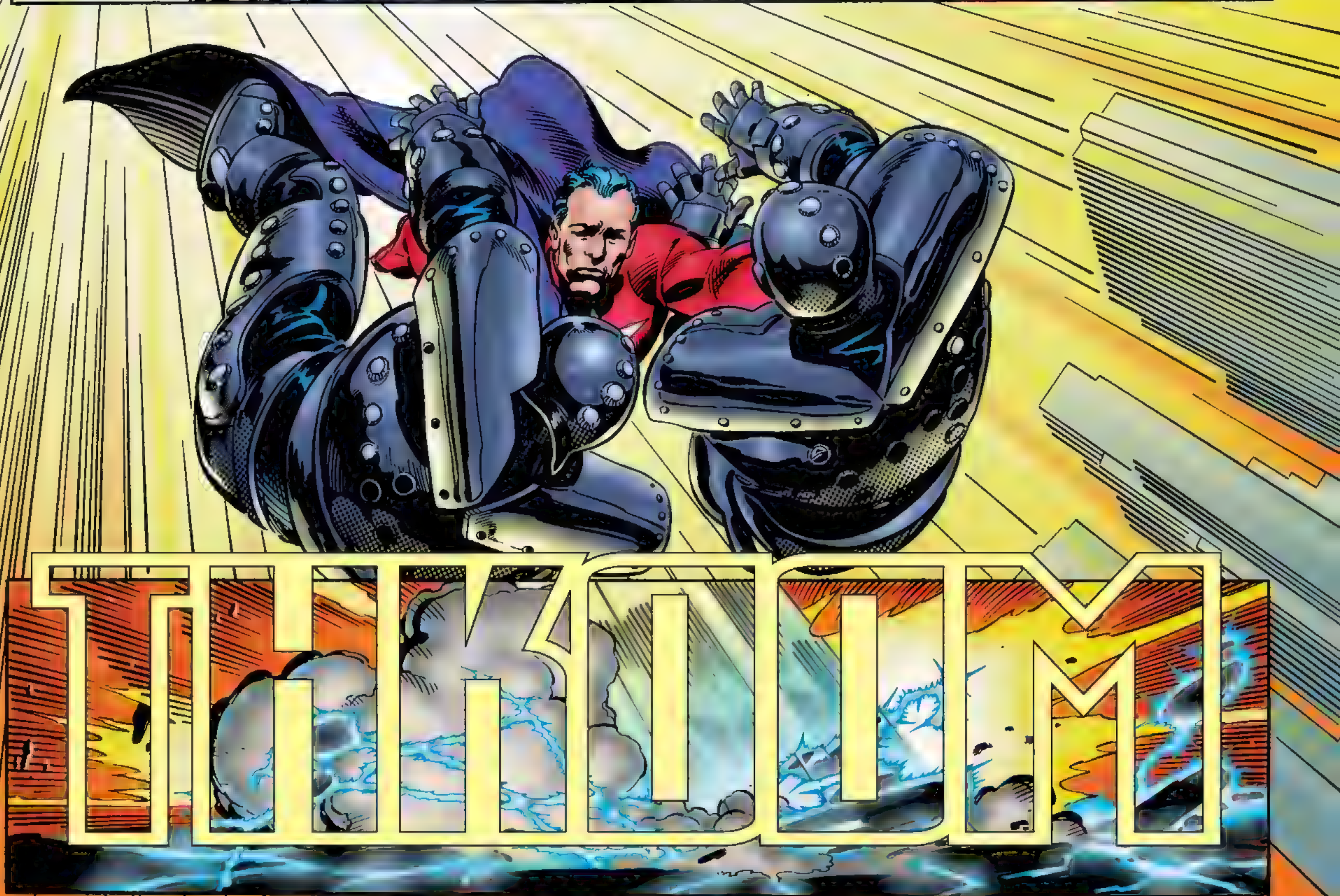
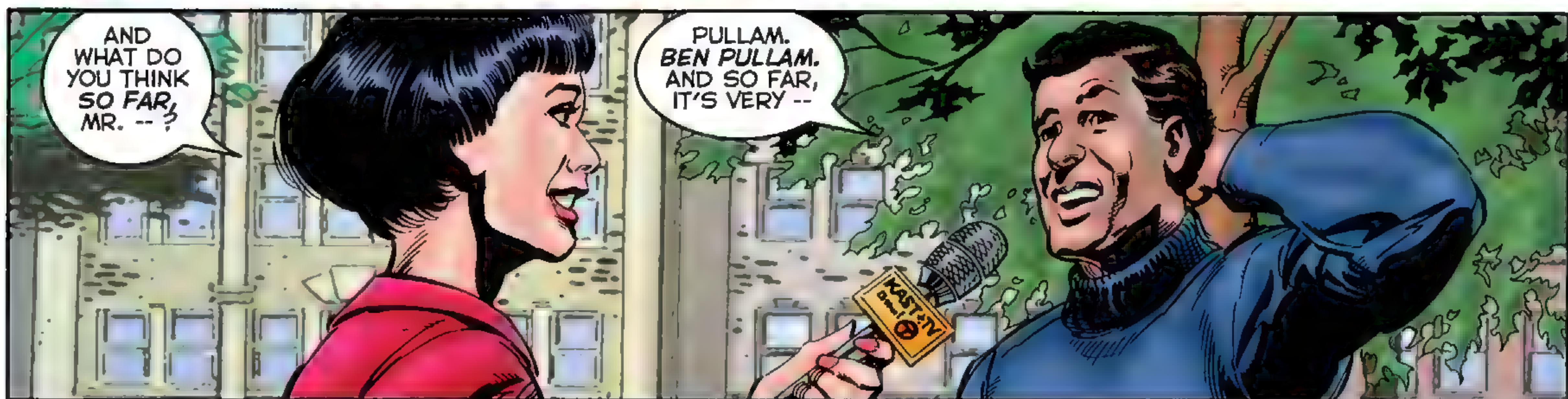
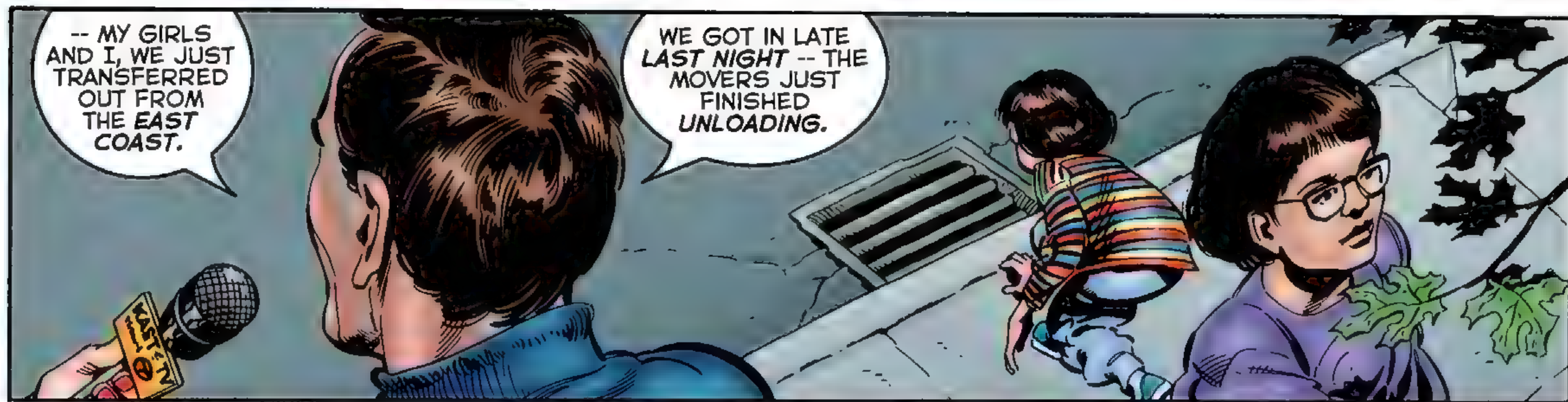



MARCY DOERR, WITH THE KAST-TV ROVING REPORT. AND WHY DO YOU LIVE IN ASTRO CITY, SIR?

UH --

I ALMOST SAY, "BECAUSE IT ISN'T BOSTON," BUT I CATCH MYSELF.

WELL, ACTUALLY, THIS IS OUR FIRST DAY HERE --





THEY SAID DON'T BE A
DOPE, DON'T TRANSFER,
NOT THERE.

THEY SAID ASTRO
CITY'S CRAWLING
WITH COSTUMES, IT'S
TOO DANGEROUS.
THINK OF THE GIRLS.

BUT EVERY BIG
CITY'S GOT SOME
SUPERHEROES --
EVEN IN BOSTON, I
SAW THE SILVERSMITH
A COUPLE TIMES.
I SAW THE BRAHMIN
ONCE, TOO, OUT
IN SAUGUS.

AND ANYWAY, I HAD
TO GET AWAY, GET
CLEAR -- BEFORE I
WALLOWED SO LONG I
WOULD UP DROWNED.

I HAD TO
MAKE A
FRESH
START.

Welcome
to

ASTRO
CITY



BUT WE HAVEN'T
BEEN HERE TWELVE
HOURS, YET, AND --

DADDY, THAT'S
SAMARITAN. HE'S --
HE'S ONE OF THE
GOOD GUYS.

JENNY
SHELDON HAS
A T-SHIRT OF
HIM.



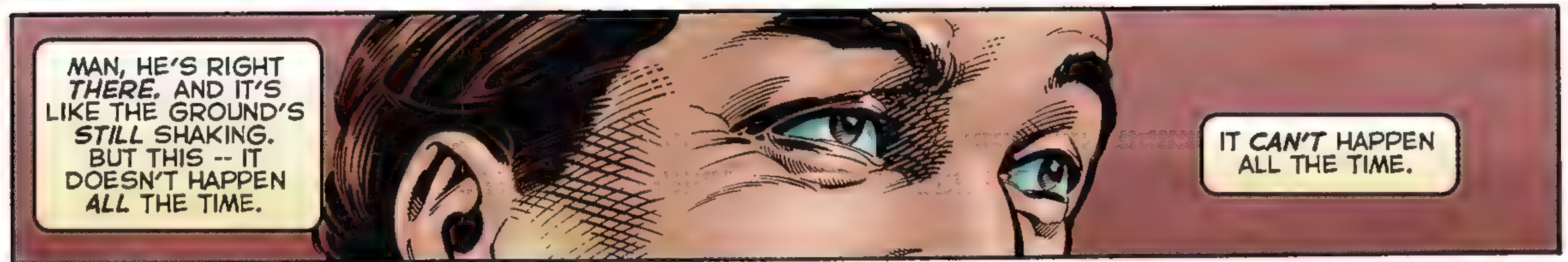
SAMARITAN!
MARCY DOERR,
KAST!

WHAT
DOES THIS
MEAN? ARE THE
IRON LEGION
ACTIVE
AGAIN?



NOT ANY
MORE.

NOW
IF YOU'LL
EXCUSE
ME -- ?



MAN, HE'S RIGHT
THERE, AND IT'S
LIKE THE GROUND'S
STILL SHAKING.
BUT THIS -- IT
DOESN'T HAPPEN
ALL THE TIME.

IT CAN'T HAPPEN
ALL THE TIME.

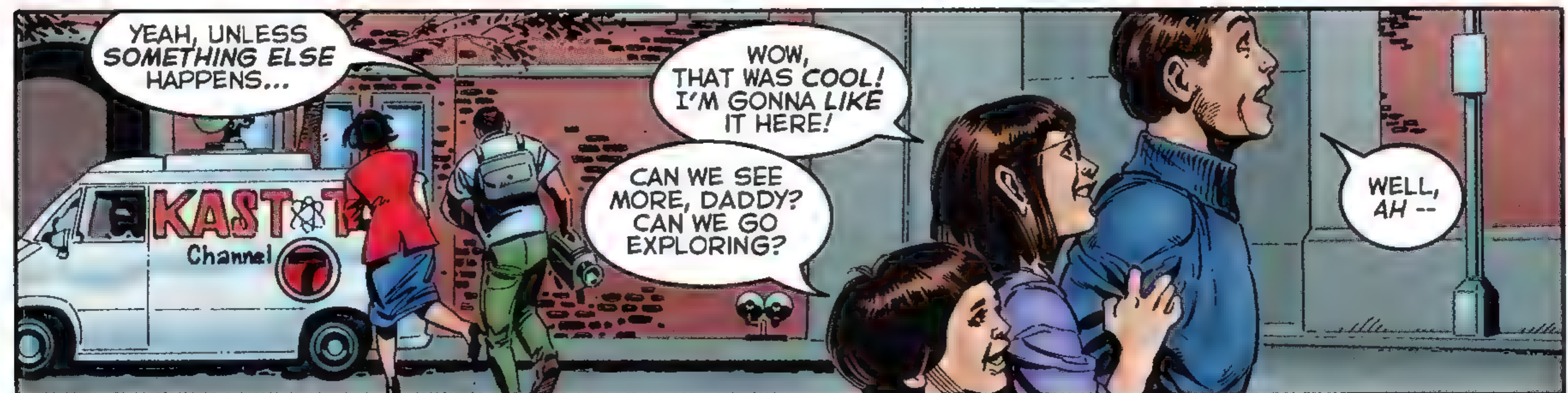


TELL ME YOU
GOT THAT,
PETE.

GOT
IT.

THEN
LET'S
GO --

-- WE CAN
DO MAN-ON-THE-
STREET ANYTIME.
THIS'LL MAKE THE
NOON REPORT!



YEAH, UNLESS
SOMETHING ELSE
HAPPENS...

WOW,
THAT WAS COOL!
I'M GONNA LIKE
IT HERE!

CAN WE SEE
MORE, DADDY?
CAN WE GO
EXPLORING?

WELL,
AH --



"-- I GUESS WE COULD DO SOME SIGHTSEEING..."

SEE -- THAT'S THE ASTROBANK TOWER.

THAT ROCKET ON TOP'S AN EMERGENCY BEACON -- THEY USE IT TO CONTACT THE HEROES, WHEN THEY NEED 'EM.



AND THAT'S AIR ACE. HE'S THE VERY FIRST SUPERHERO -- FIRST WE KNOW ABOUT, ANYWAY -- AND HE WAS FROM RIGHT HERE.

FROM OLDEN DAYS, DADDY?

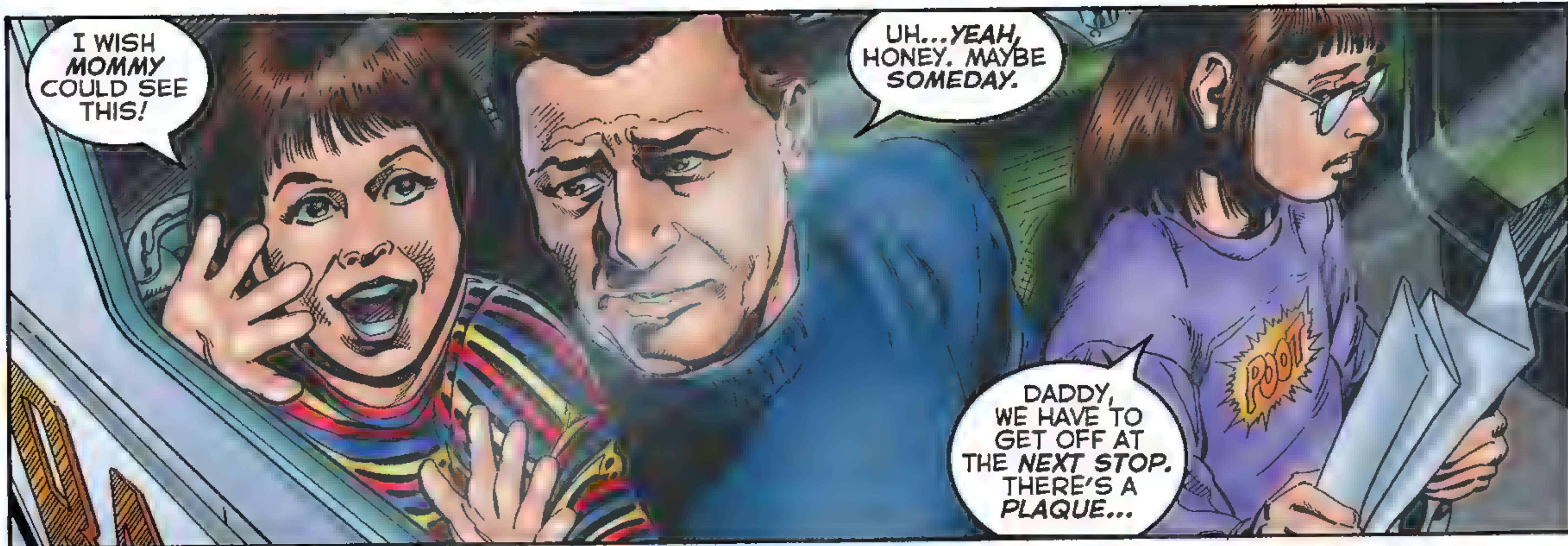
NOT THAT OLDEN, FAITHIE -- BUT IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO.



LOOK, DADDY, LOOK! THAT'S LOONY LEO, FROM THE CARTOONS!

THAT'S RIGHT -- THAT'S HIS RESTAURANT. I HEARD HE WAS OUT HERE, BUT I GUESS I FORGOT.

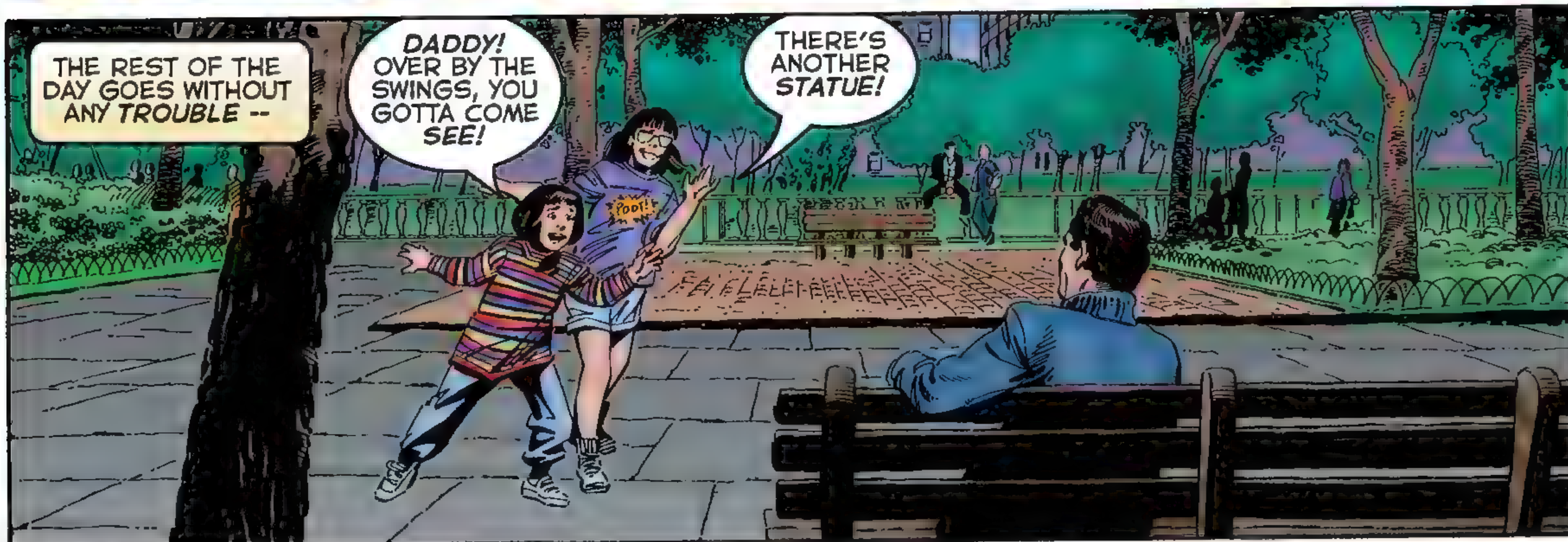
HUH. SO THAT'S IT...



I WISH MOMMY COULD SEE THIS!

UH...YEAH, HONEY. MAYBE SOMEDAY.

DADDY, WE HAVE TO GET OFF AT THE NEXT STOP. THERE'S A PLAQUE...



THE REST OF THE DAY GOES WITHOUT ANY TROUBLE --

DADDY! OVER BY THE SWINGS, YOU GOTTA COME SEE!

THERE'S ANOTHER STATUE!

-- WELL, WITHOUT MUCH TROUBLE --

THAT'S THE **SILVER AGENT**, GIRLS. HE WAS AROUND WHEN I WAS A **BOY** -- I USED TO SEE HIM ON TV ALL THE TIME.

MAN, I USED TO HAVE A **SILVER AGENT** JUNIOR PEACE OFFICER BADGE AND DETECTIVE KIT...

WHAT'S THE **INSCRIPTION** MEAN?

ALAN CRAIG
THE SILVER AGENT
1932-1973
"TO OUR ETERNAL SHAME"

ETERNAL SHAME. HOW COME IT SAYS "ETERNAL SHAME?"

UH...I'LL EXPLAIN IT TO YOU WHEN YOU'RE **OLDER**.

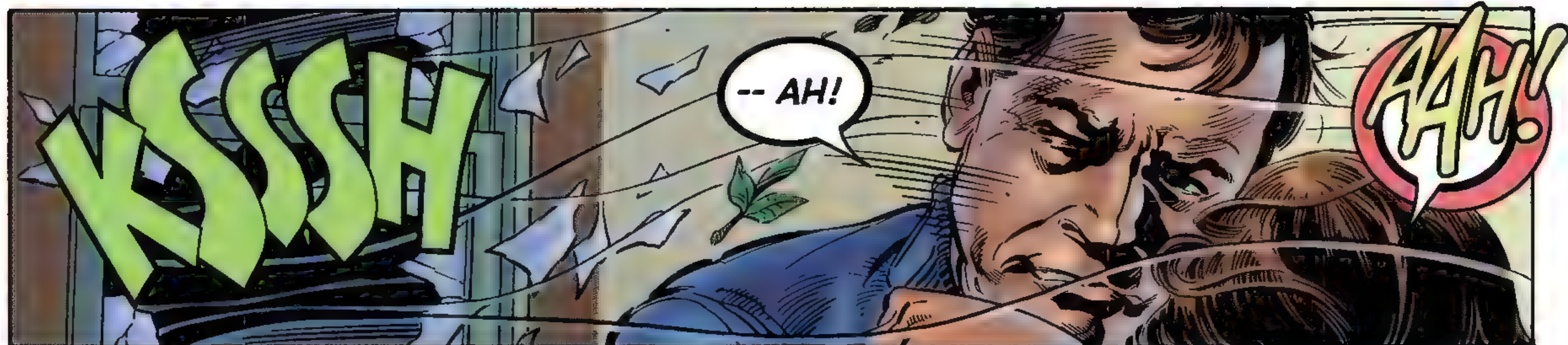
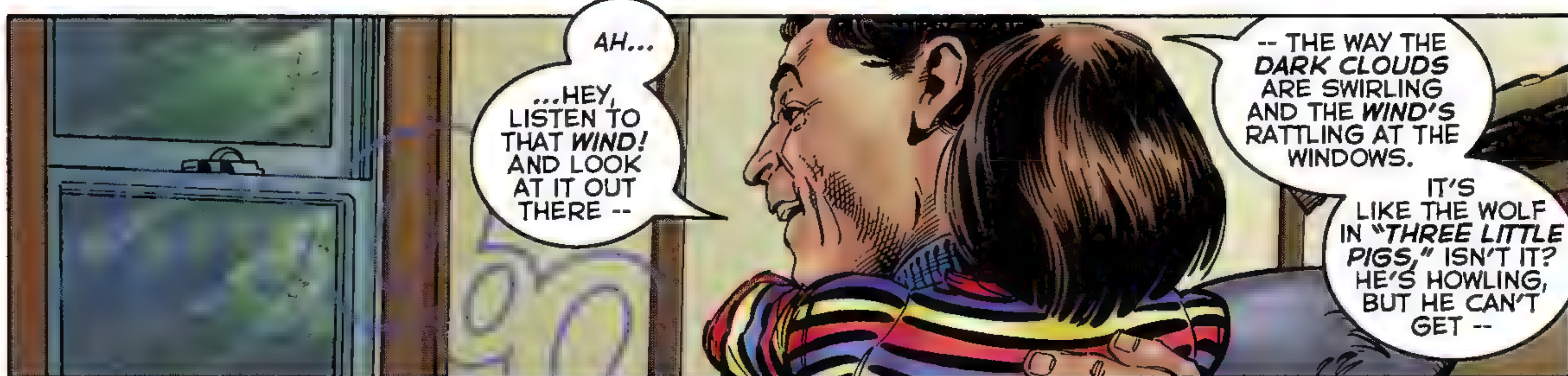
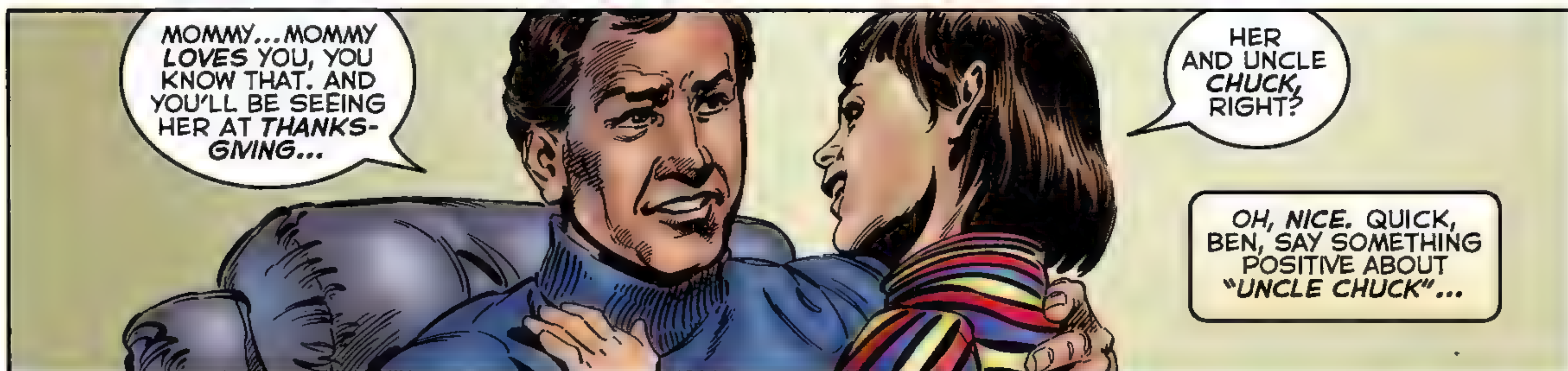
WHEN I'M **OLDER**, OR WHEN **MEG'S** **OLDER**?

WHEN YOU'RE **BOTH** **OLDER**, FAITHIE. NOW COME ON, LET'S GO HOME...

WHEN THEY'RE **OLDER**. WHO AM I KIDDING? THEY SOAK UP EVERYTHING WE SAY OR DO, LIKE LITTLE SPONGES.

AND WE'RE **ALWAYS** TEACHING THEM. LIKE IT OR NOT, WE'RE TEACHING THEM SOMETHING.

...IT'S GETTING A LITTLE COLD...





YOU HAVE
TRANSGRESSED
AGAINST ME, HUMANS!
YOU HAVE **STOLEN**, AND
YOU WILL **RETURN**
THAT WHICH YOU
STOLE --

-- AND
PERHAPS
YOU WILL **SURVIVE**
MY COMING
RETRIBUTION!

FAIL TO
RESTORE THAT
WHICH IS MINE, AND
YOU WILL PERISH
IN **DARKNESS**
AND **PAIN!**

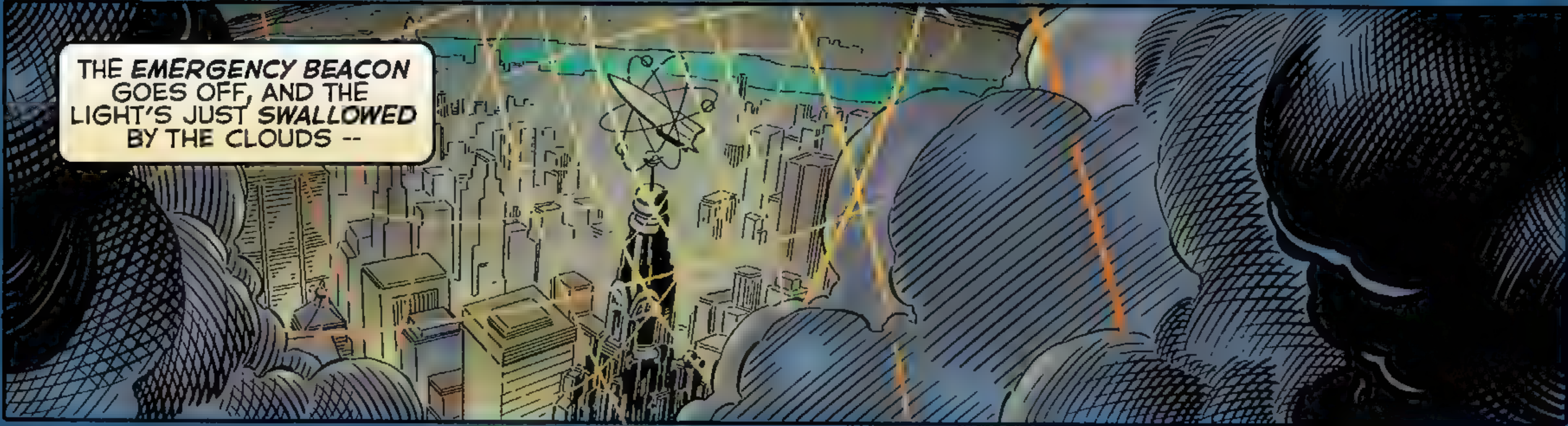
I GIVE YOU
ONE-TWELFTH
OF ONE OF YOUR
HOURS --

-- AND THEN
MY RAGE SHALL BE
VISITED ON YOU, AND
MARK MY WORDS, IT
SHALL BE **TERRIBLE**
TO BEHOLD!

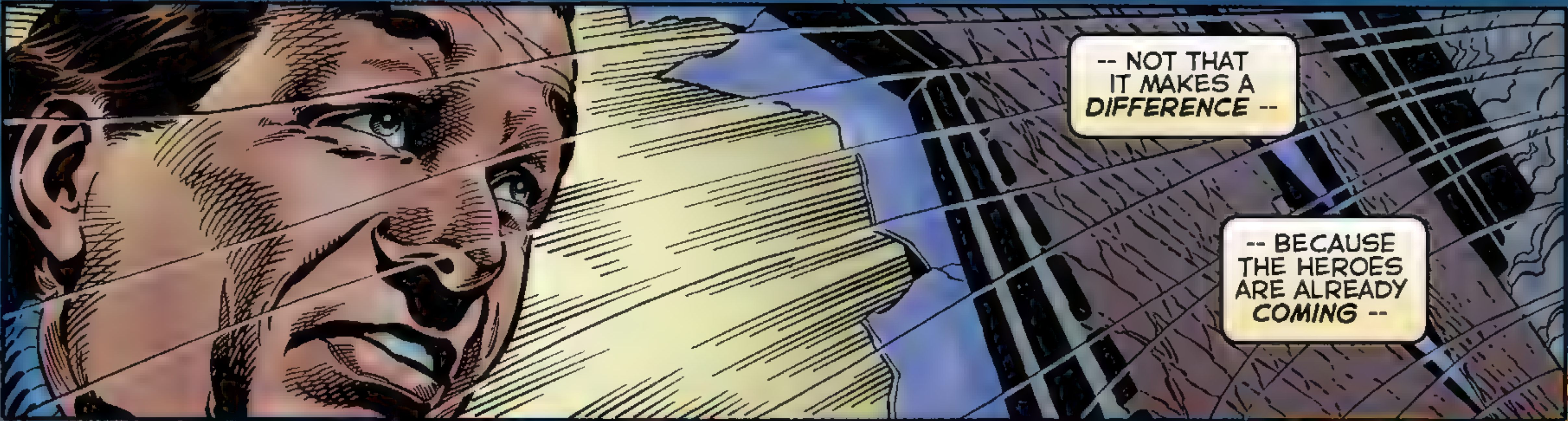
NO, BOSTON
WAS NEVER
LIKE THIS --

WHAT IS IT,
DADDY? IT'S NOT
THE WOLF,
IS IT?

THE
WOLF'S NOT
REAL...



THE EMERGENCY BEACON
GOES OFF, AND THE
LIGHT'S JUST SWALLOWED
BY THE CLOUDS --



-- NOT THAT
IT MAKES A
DIFFERENCE --

-- BECAUSE
THE HEROES
ARE ALREADY
COMING --

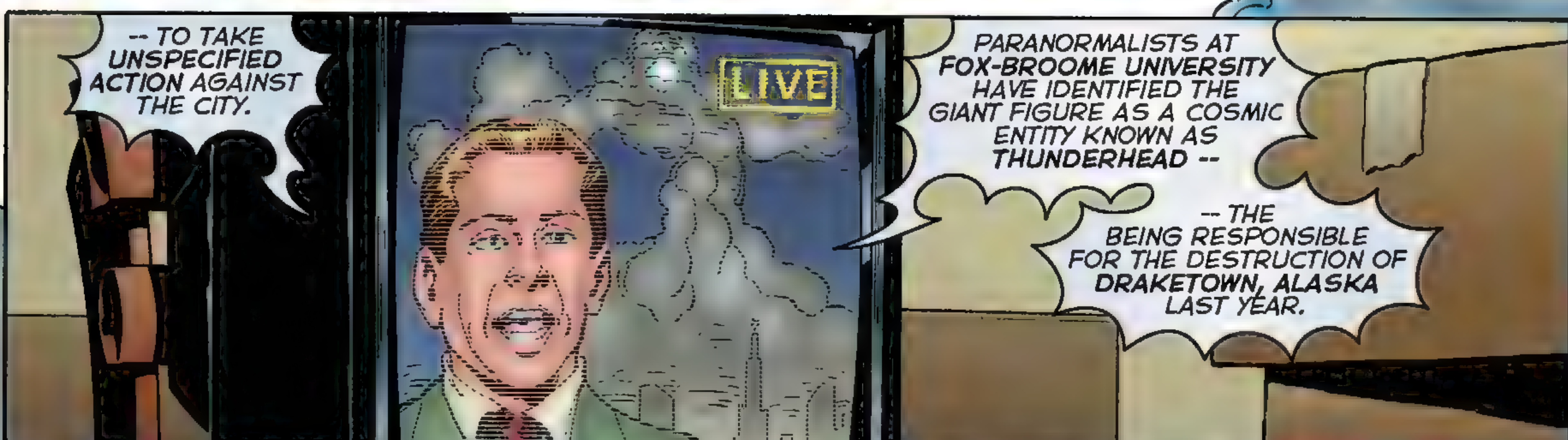
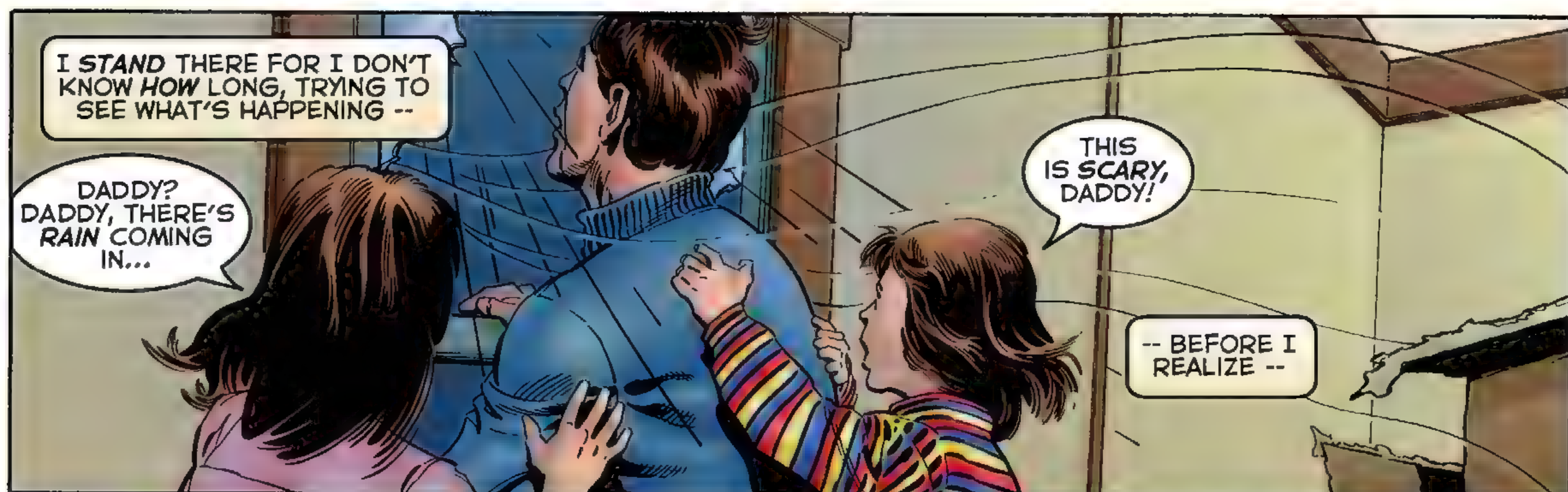
-- FLYING UP AT THAT
CREATURE LIKE
THERE'S NOTHING THAT
CAN STOP THEM --

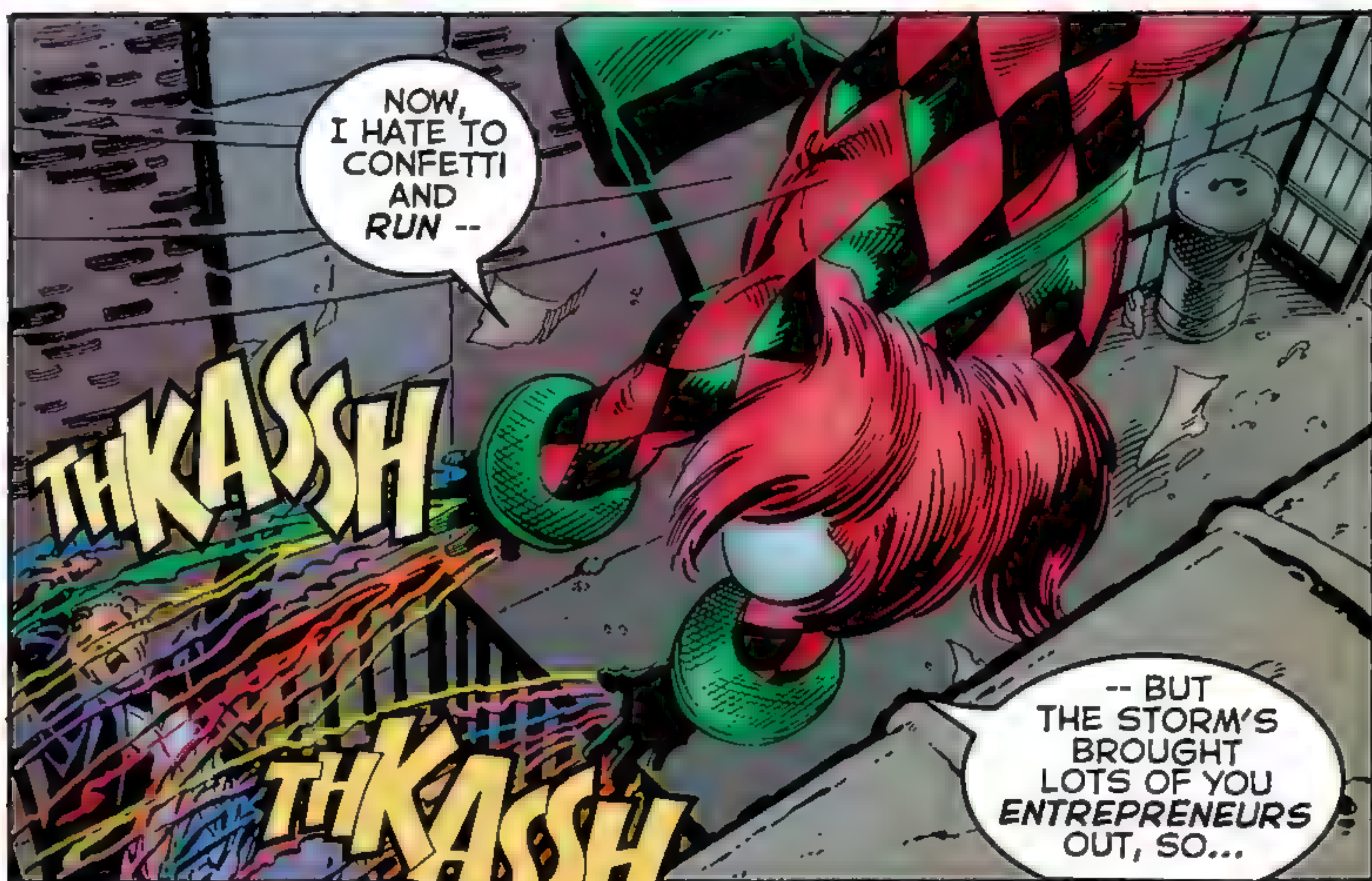


-- AND I NOTICE SOMETHING
I NEVER THOUGHT ABOUT
BEFORE -- THAT HERE, SEEING
THEM IN PERSON LIKE THIS --



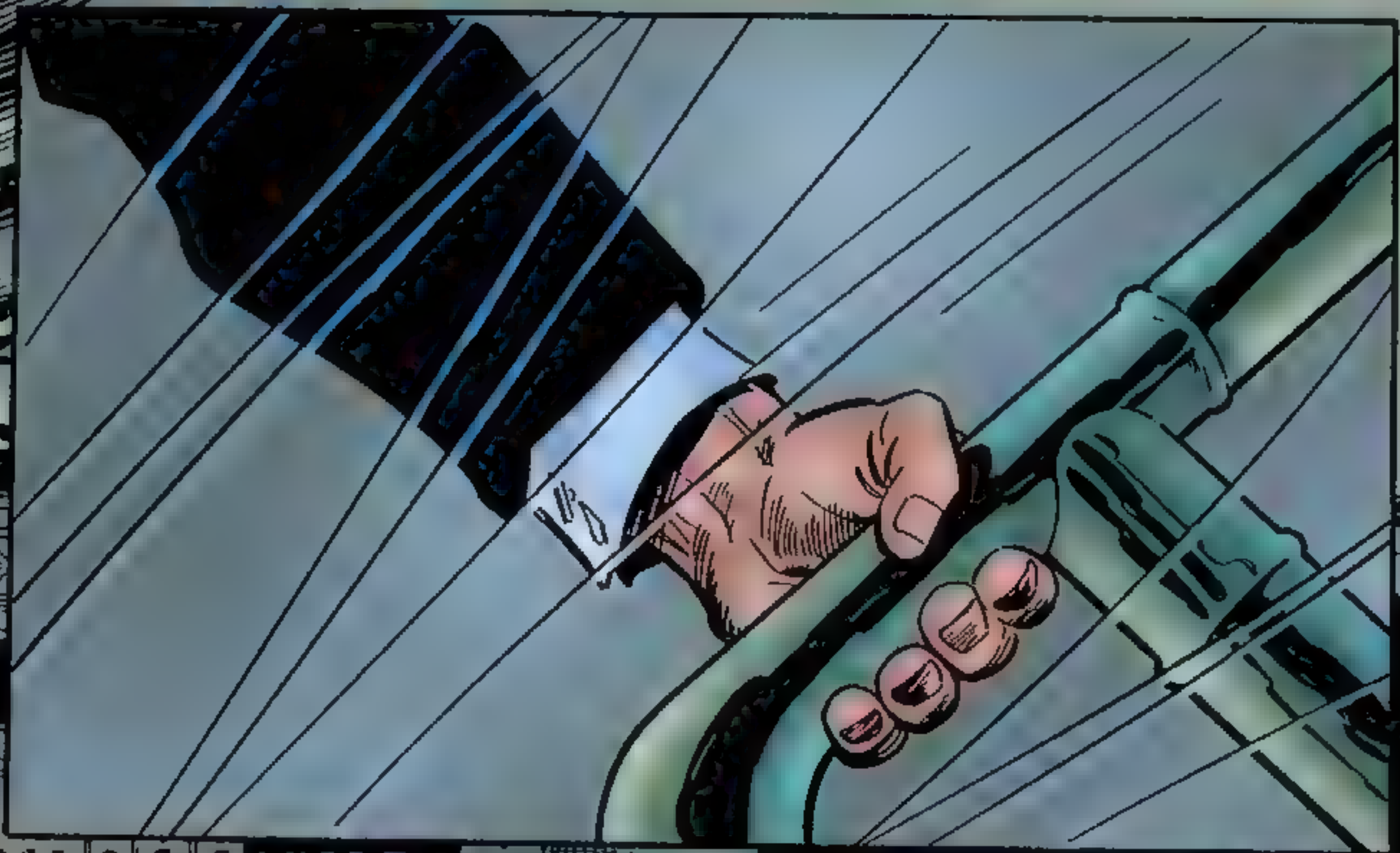
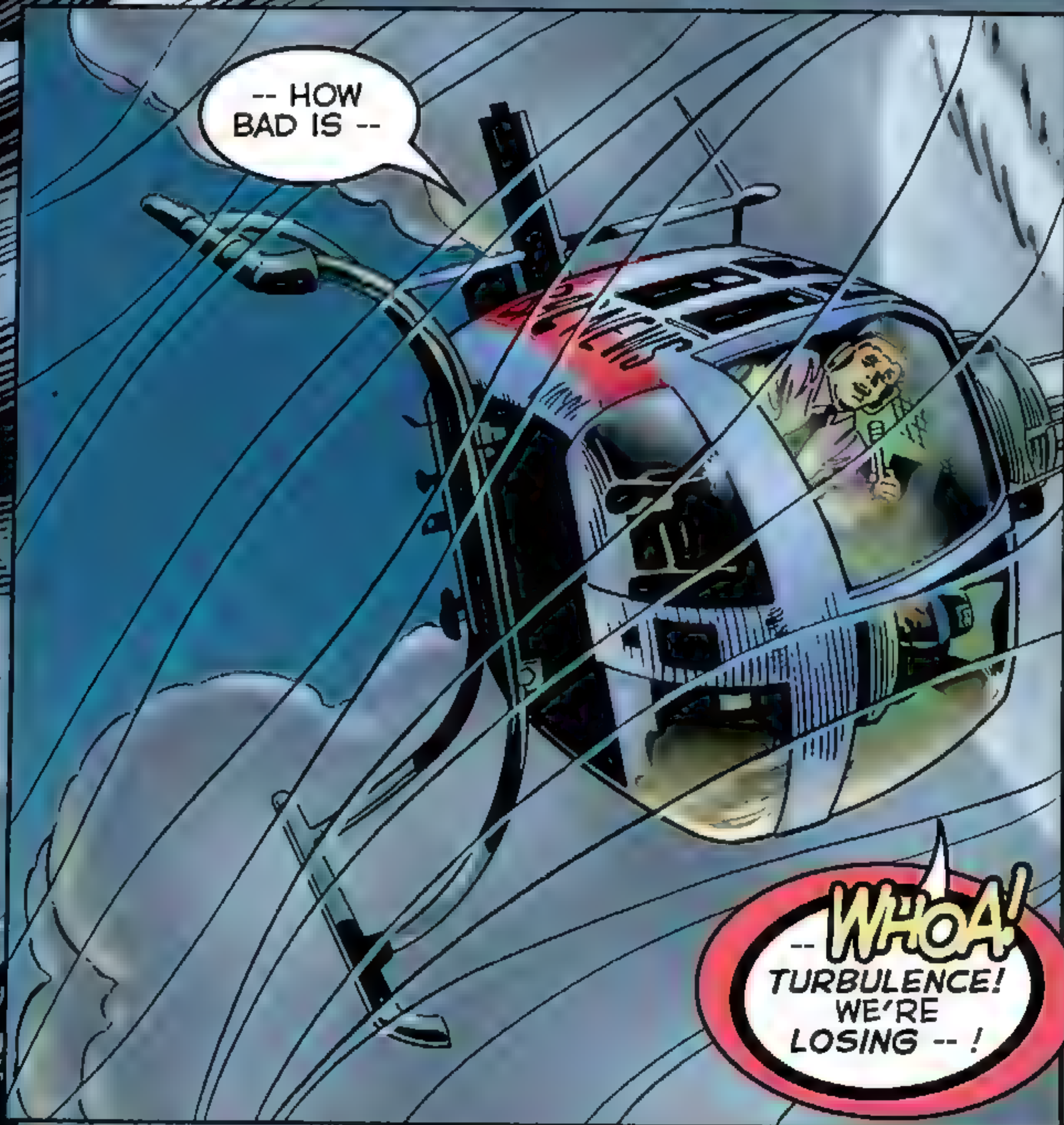
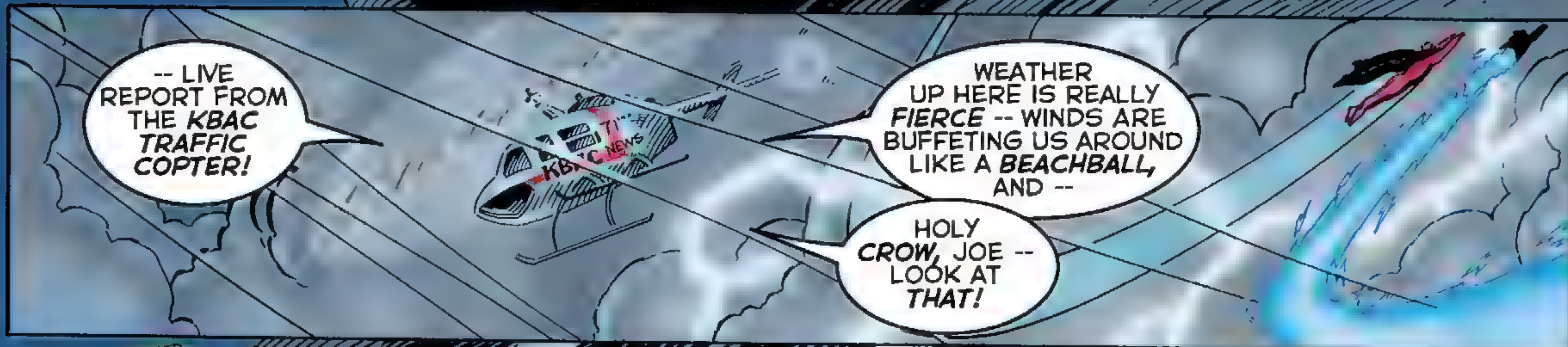
-- THEY LOOK
SO SMALL --





AND CRACKERJACK, OF COURSE! CAN'T FORGET HIM -- MUCH AS WE MIGHT LIKE TO -- !







"-- AND THEY DIDN'T WANT US TO SEE?"

BLANGLANCE

STAY

3.86% APR

ASTROBANK

QUICK, TO THE CAR!

WE GOTTA GET OUT OF HERE -- BEFORE WE'RE SPOTTED!

ASTROBANK

BLANGLANCE

BLANGLANCE

TOO LATE, OTTER.

AW, NUTS!

THE CITY'S ABOUT TO GET FLATTENED BY A FREAKIN' WEATHER GOD -- AND YOU GOTTA PICK ON US?!

YEAH, WE DO.

LOOK AT IT FROM OUR SIDE. WE'RE NOT MUCH AGAINST WEATHER GODS --

-- BUT CLOWNS WHO SEE A BIG FUSS AND THINK IT'LL MAKE A PERFECT DIVERSION FOR THEIR OWN LITTLE GAMES?

WAK

KRAK

THAT, WE CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT.

ONE MORE IN THE WIN COLUMN FOR NIGHTINGALE AND SUNBIRD, LOOKS LIKE.

SO, PETE -- WHY DO YOU LIVE IN ASTRO CITY?

OH, NO QUESTION, MARCY. I'D HAVE TO SAY --

"-- THE PEACE
AND QUIET."

AFTER AWHILE, THEY RUN
OUT OF **STUFF** TO SAY ON
TV, AND SITTING INSIDE
WITH IT RIGHT OVER OUR
HEADS IS TOO MUCH.

WE FIND THE
ROOF ACCESS --

HUH?

HEY, LOOK!
EVERYBODY'S
UP HERE
ALREADY!

THERE'S
MRS. DAMIANI,
AND THE GUY WITH
THE DOGS,
AND --

IT'S LIKE A PARTY OR SOMETHING -- SOME
OF 'EM EVEN BROUGHT UP LAWN CHAIRS.

BUT IT'S A QUIET
PARTY. NO CHATTER,
NO CONVERSATION --

-- JUST... WAITING.
WAITING FOR SOME-
THING TO HAPPEN.

HI, MRS.
DAMIANI!
WHERE'S
BOBBY?

HIYA,
KIDDO. HE'S
DOWNSTAIRS --
HE'S GOT A PAPER
TO WRITE FOR
SCHOOL.

HE'S WRITING A
PAPER? WITH ALL
THIS GOING ON?
ISN'T HE --

-- AREN'T YOU

WORRIED?!

WELL, SURE, BUT
WHAT ARE WE SUPPOSED
TO DO? IT'S OUT OF
OUR HANDS, YOU
KNOW?

AND
HEY --



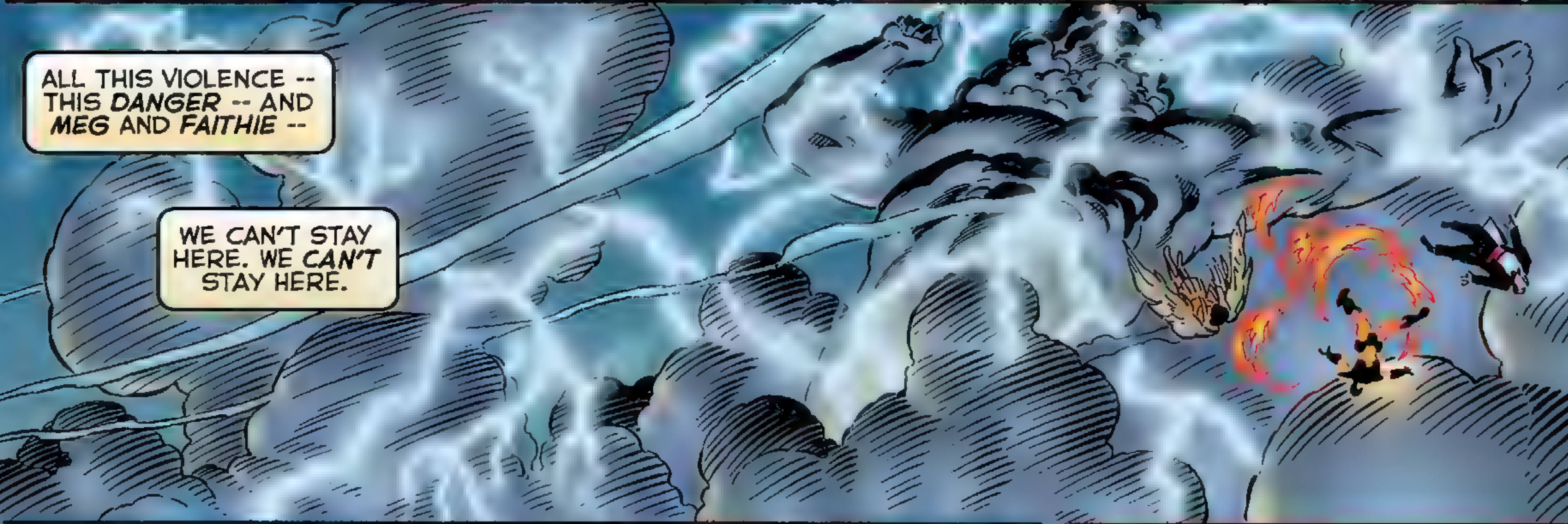
-- IF THE WORLD DOESN'T END, HE'S STILL GOT SCHOOL, RIGHT?

IF THE WORLD DOESN'T END, HE'S STILL GOT SCHOOL.

THIS IS NUTS. THIS IS A NIGHTMARE.

ALL THIS VIOLENCE -- THIS DANGER -- AND MEG AND FAITHIE --

WE CAN'T STAY HERE. WE CAN'T STAY HERE.



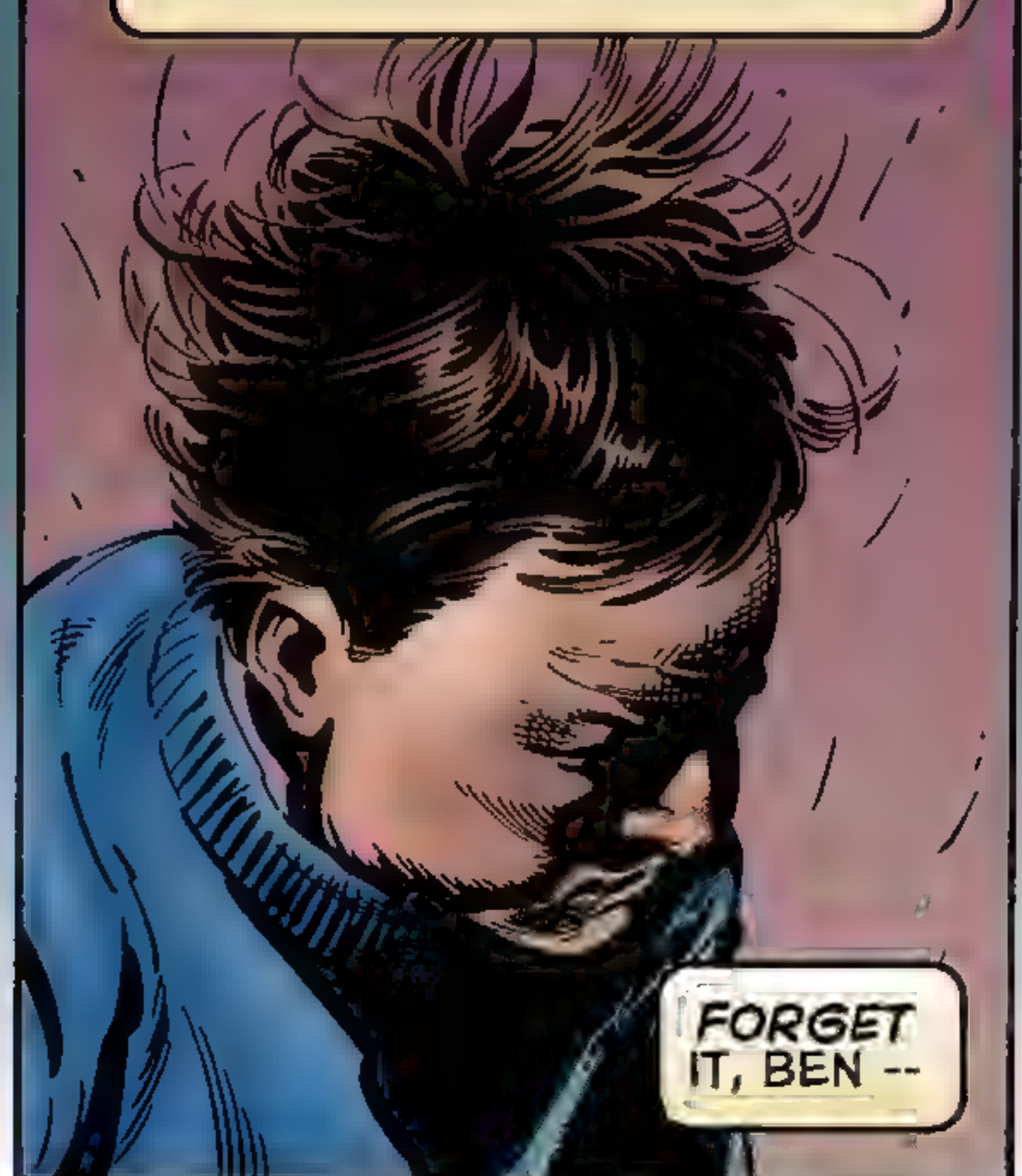
WHAT ARE YOU TEACHING THEM, BEN? THAT IT'S OKAY TO JUST RUN AWAY -- TO PUT PEOPLE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO PROTECT IN DANGER --

-- BECAUSE YOU'RE NOT MAN ENOUGH TO TAKE IT AND SMILE? WHAT'LL THEY LEARN HERE, BEN? HOW TO DUCK AND COVER?

YOU CAN'T STAY HERE, BEN.



YOU CAN GET YOUR OLD JOB BACK, IF YOU CRAWL A LITTLE. YOU CAN FIND A PLACE, MAYBE IN CHARLESTOWN. AND LORRAINE -- LORRAINE --



FORGET IT, BEN --

-- JUST DO WHAT THE GIRLS NEED.





AND THEN -- THERE'S
A BOLT, SO NEAR WE
CAN SMELL IT --

-- AND A FIGURE
IN THE DARK --



-- AND --

UH --
AH --
AH --



EH?



NO
HARM.

I
PROMISE.




WE
ALL
DO.

WOW,
DADDY! SHE'S
NEAT! SHE'S
ONE OF THE GOOD
GUYS, RIGHT?

YES,
HONEY --



-- YES,
SHE IS.



AND THEN IT
DOESN'T LOOK LIKE
WE'RE GONNA GET
THE CHANCE TO
MOVE BACK -- OR
ANYWHERE --

THE HEROES
MAKE ONE FINAL
ASSAULT --

-- AND THEY
FAIL.

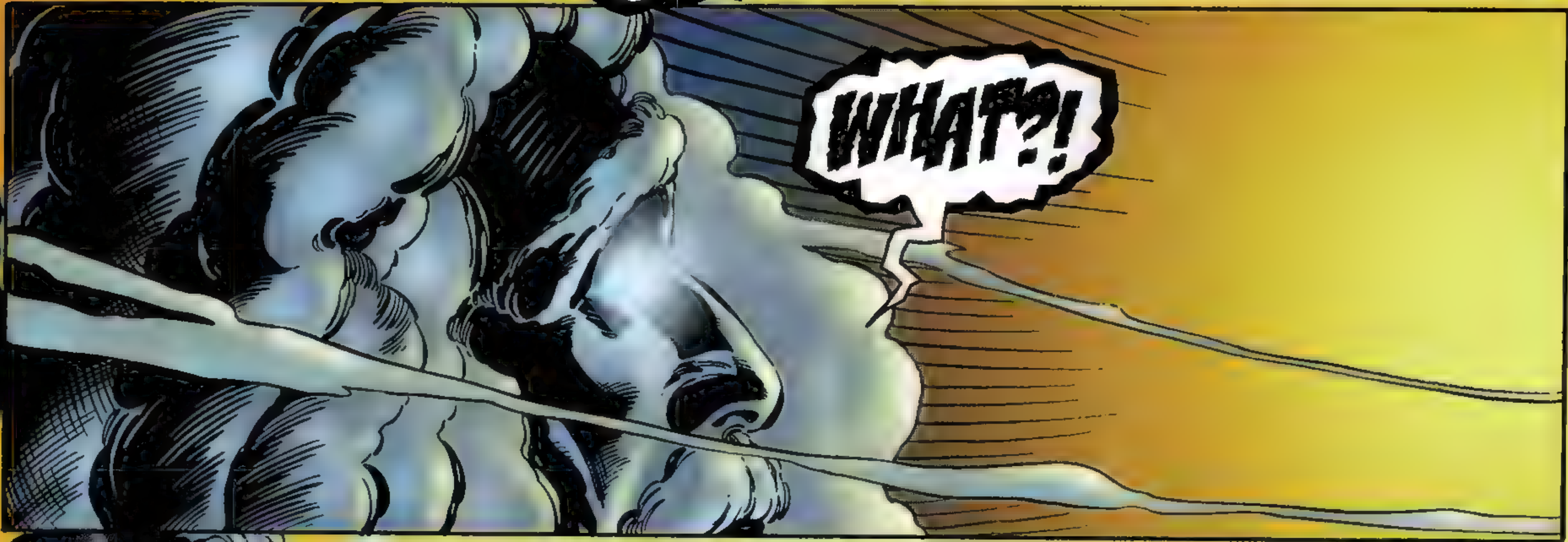
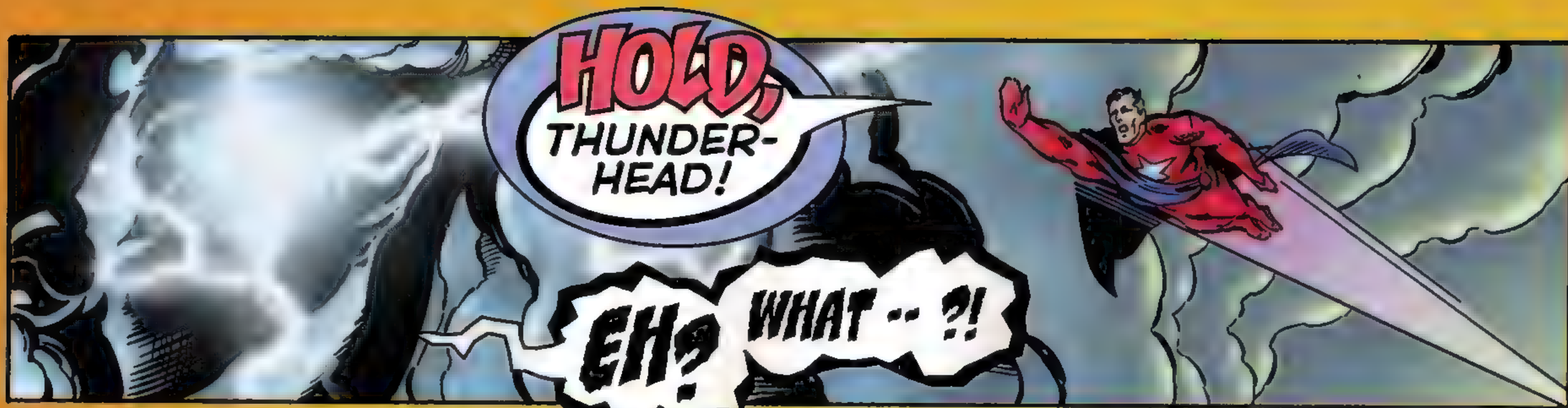
AND EVERYBODY
CAN SEE IT.
EVERYBODY'S
WATCHING --

ENOUGH!


MY
PATIENCE
IS AT AN **END**,
HUMANS! NOW YOU
SHALL **PAY THE PRICE** FOR
YOUR
TRANSGRESSION!

**NOW YOU
SHALL --**

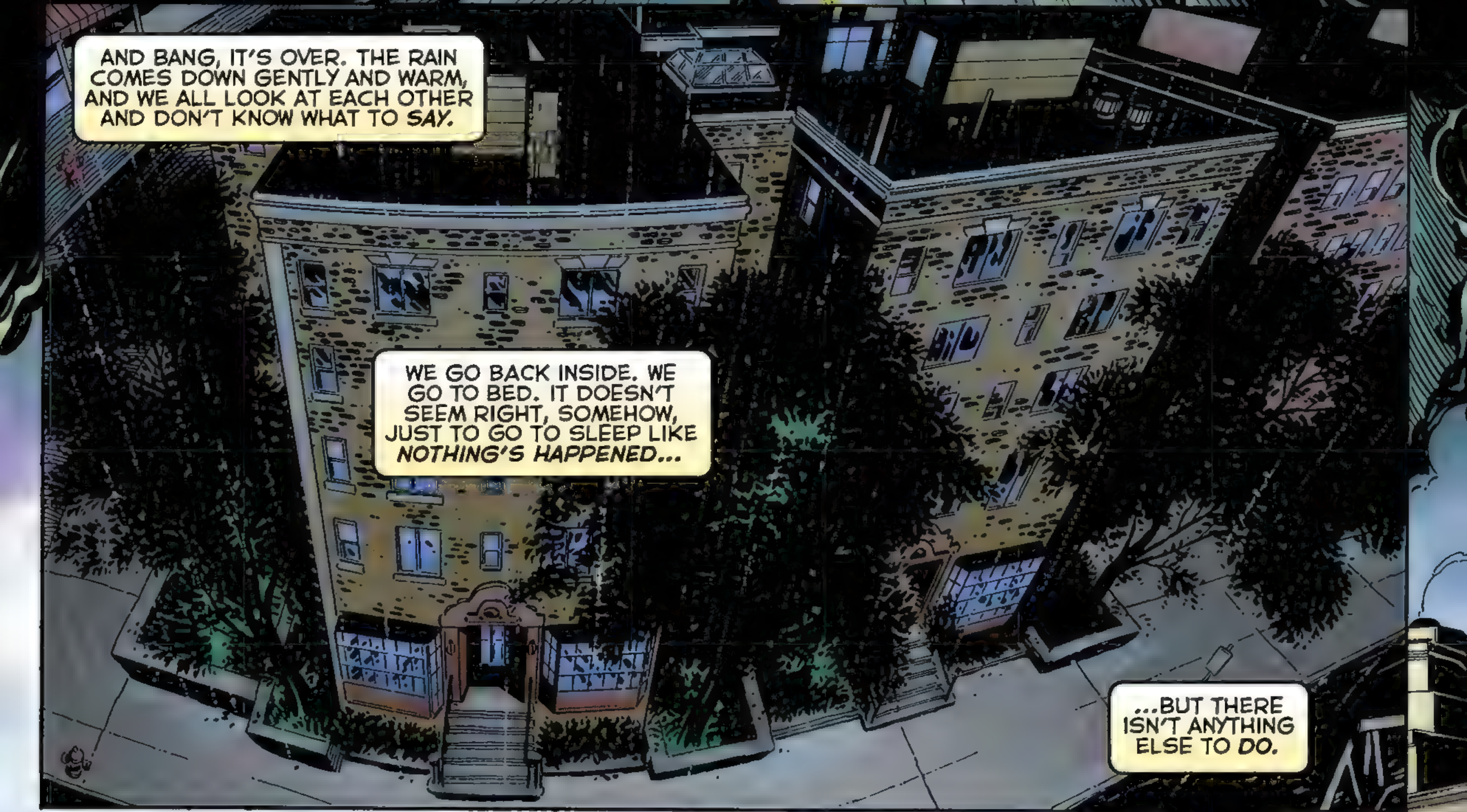
-- AND WE
ALL KNOW --
THIS IS --







...and
let us
away.




AND BANG, IT'S OVER. THE RAIN
COMES DOWN GENTLY AND WARM,
AND WE ALL LOOK AT EACH OTHER
AND DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

WE GO BACK INSIDE. WE
GO TO BED. IT DOESN'T
SEEM RIGHT, SOMEHOW,
JUST TO GO TO SLEEP LIKE
NOTHING'S HAPPENED...

...BUT THERE
ISN'T ANYTHING
ELSE TO DO.

AND THE NEXT
MORNING...



...THE NEXT MORNING THE
STREETS ARE SHINING
AND THE AIR'S FRESH
AND CLEAN...



WOW --
PUBLIC WORKS
HERE
ALREADY?

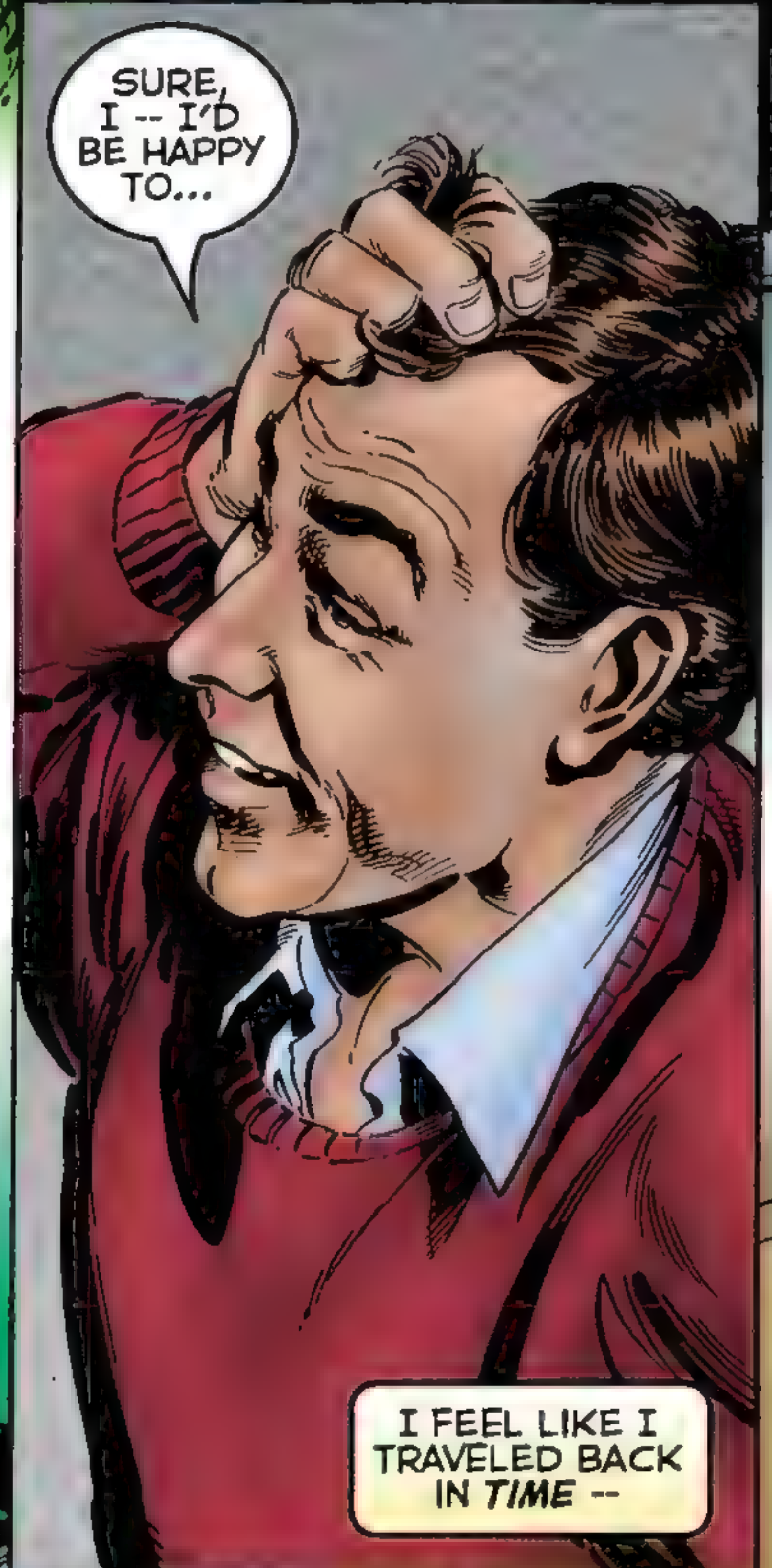
THEY'RE
REALLY VERY
GOOD. I DON'T
KNOW WHAT IT'S
LIKE ELSEWHERE --
BUT THEY TAKE
PRIDE IN THEIR
WORK HERE.



LISTEN,
WE'RE ALL
PITCHING
IN --

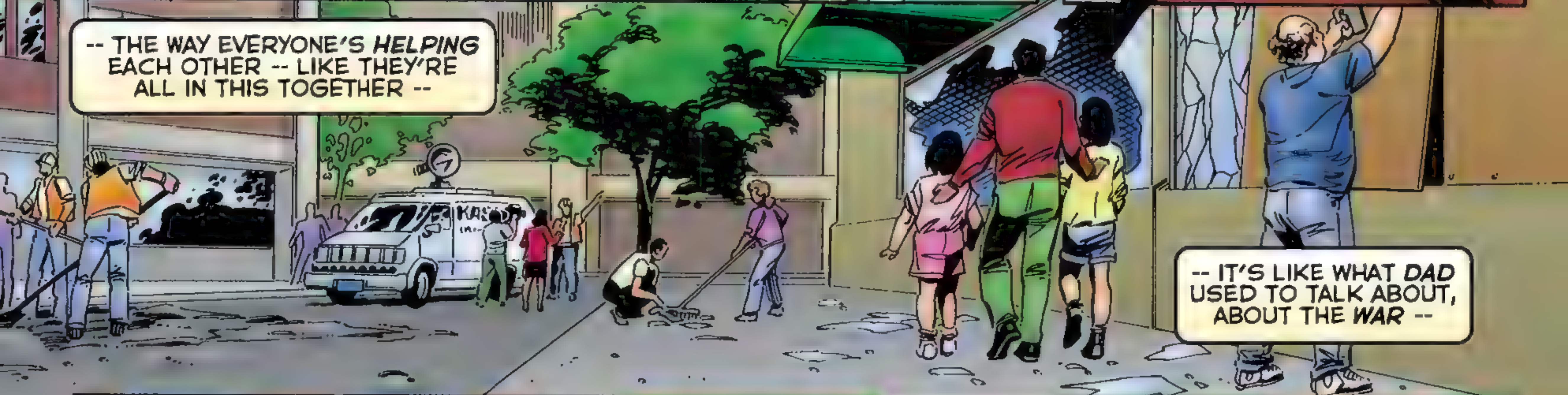
-- CLEANING UP
GLASS, BOARDING
UP BROKEN WINDOWS,
HELPING PEOPLE
WHOSE APARTMENTS
GOT DAMAGED.

WE'RE
THROWING A
POTLUCK SPAGHETTI
FEED FOR THE
WORKERS, FOR LATER
ON. CAN WE COUNT
ON YOU FOR A
SALAD, OR SOME
POP?



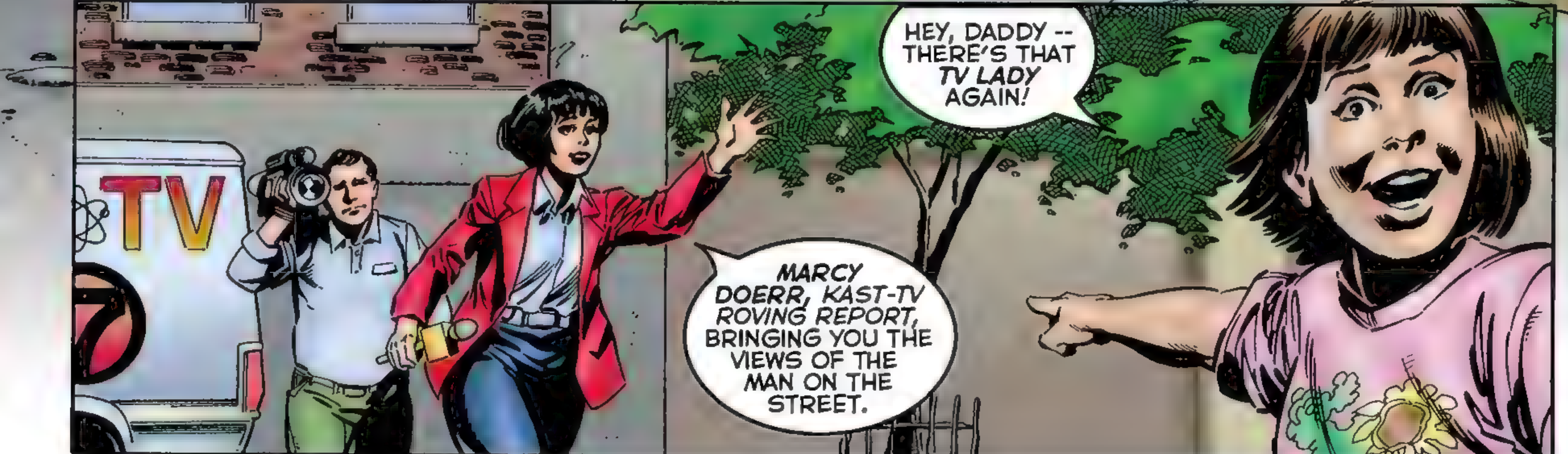
SURE,
I -- I'D
BE HAPPY
TO...

I FEEL LIKE I
TRAVELED BACK
IN TIME --



-- THE WAY EVERYONE'S HELPING
EACH OTHER -- LIKE THEY'RE
ALL IN THIS TOGETHER --

-- IT'S LIKE WHAT DAD
USED TO TALK ABOUT,
ABOUT THE WAR --



HEY, DADDY --
THERE'S THAT
TV LADY
AGAIN!

MARCY
DOERR, KAST-TV
ROVING REPORT,
BRINGING YOU THE
VIEWS OF THE
MAN ON THE
STREET.



MR. --
PULLAM, WAS
IT? WE NEVER DID
FINISH TALKING,
YESTERDAY.

SO,
YOU HAD
QUITE A **NIGHT**.
WHAT DO YOU
THINK OF **ASTRO
CITY** NOW?

I...
WELL...



LAST NIGHT WAS **INSANE**.
IT WAS **HORRIBLE**.

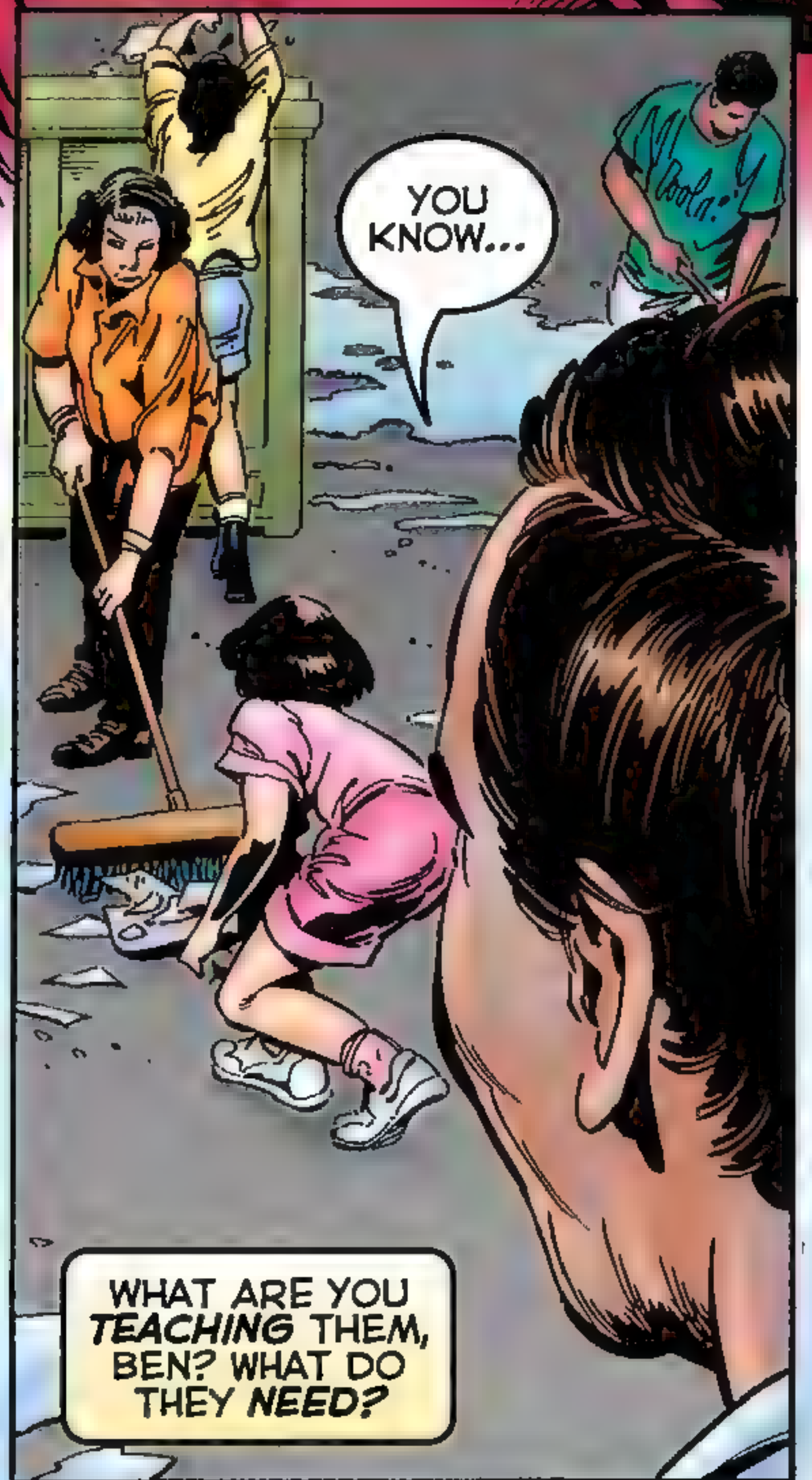
BUT...WATCHING THE
HEROES... SEEING
THE PEOPLE **TODAY**,
THE CITY WORKERS,
THE NEIGHBORS...

IT'S DANGEROUS.
IT'S FRIGHTENING.



BUT WORDS LIKE **HONOR**, AND
TRUST, AND **COMMITMENT** --
THEY'RE JUST **WORDS** MOST
PLACES. HERE...

...HERE,
THEY'RE...



YOU
KNOW...

WHAT ARE YOU
TEACHING THEM,
BEN? WHAT DO
THEY **NEED**?



...I
THINK
WE'LL
STAY.

YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY





This is where
I live.

I live up on the mountain with
my **Mom** and **Dad** and **Grandpa**
and my **Uncle Nick** and
my **Uncle Julie** --

-- 'cept my Uncle
Julie's my **great-**
uncle, really.

And every
morning,
I get up --

TIME TO
GET UP,
ASTRA!

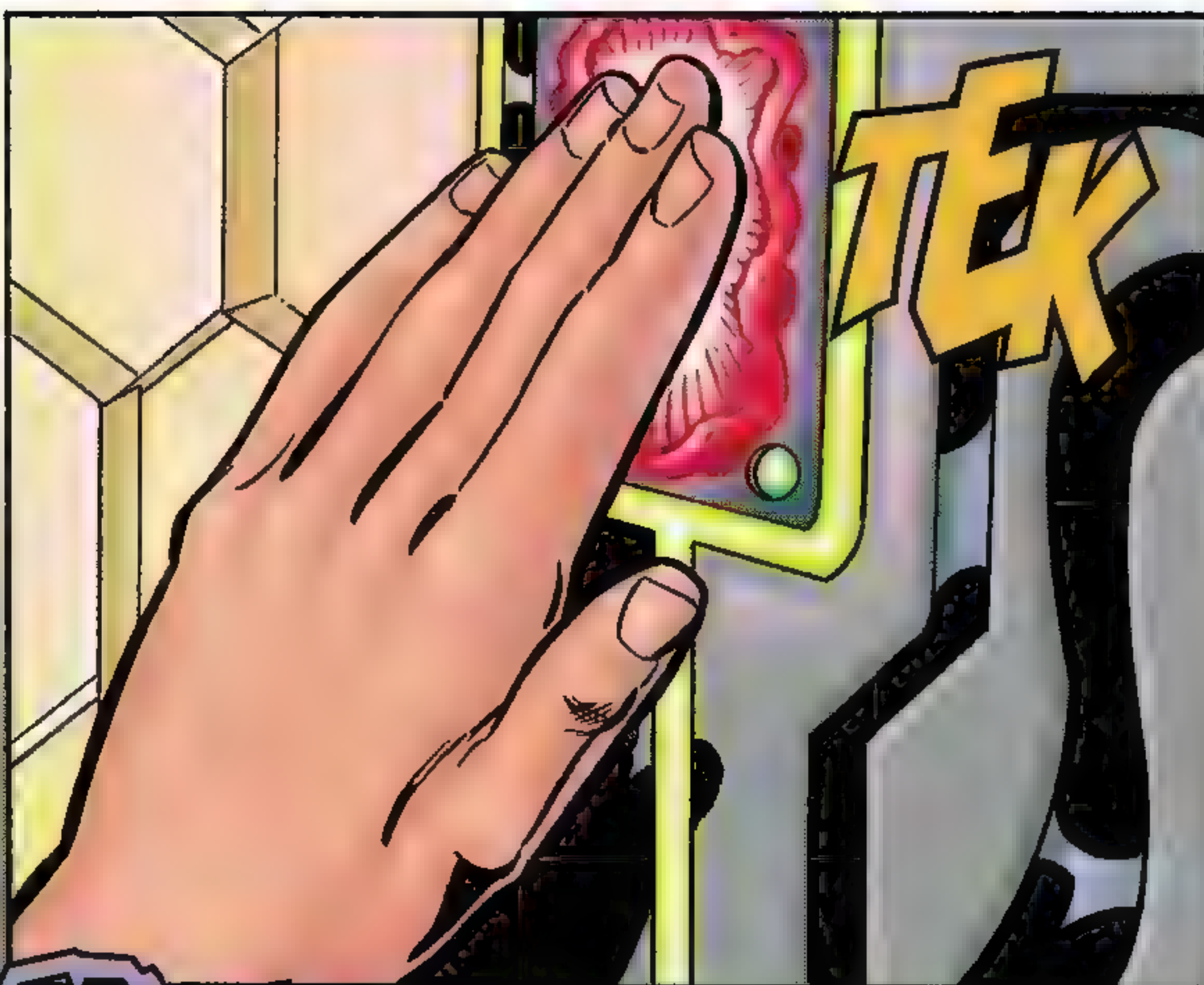
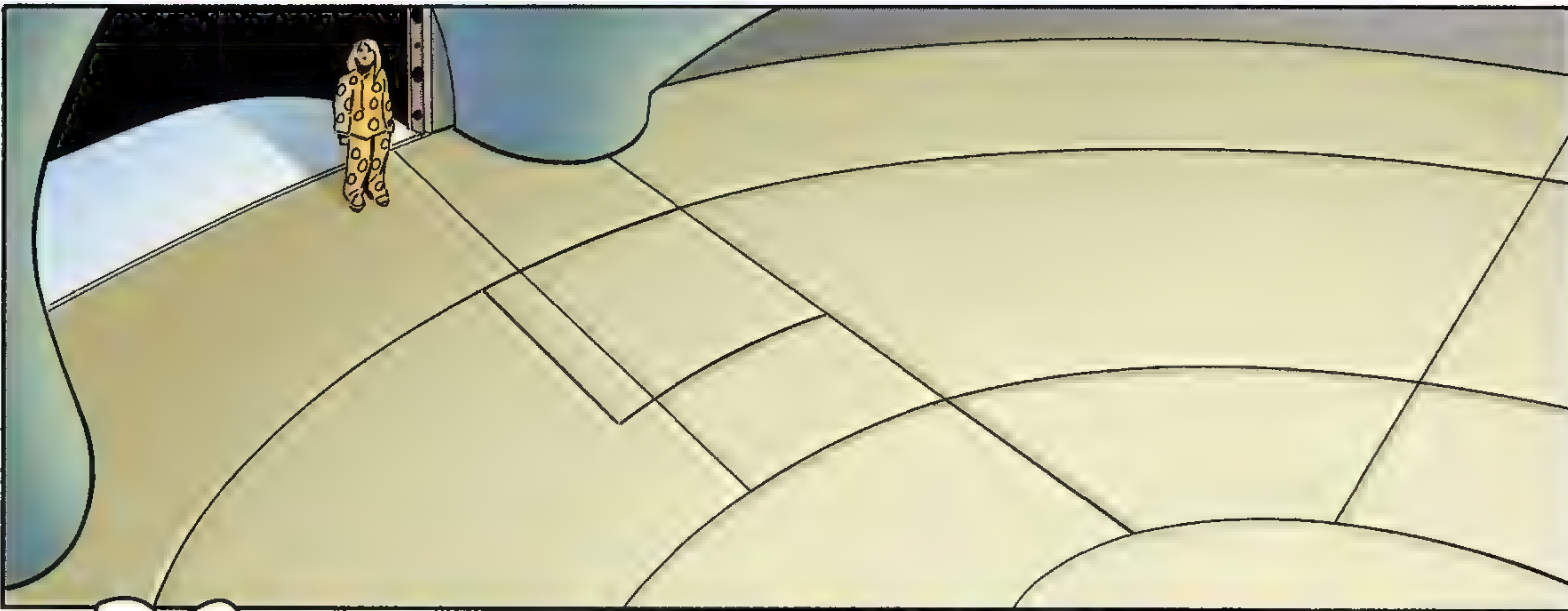
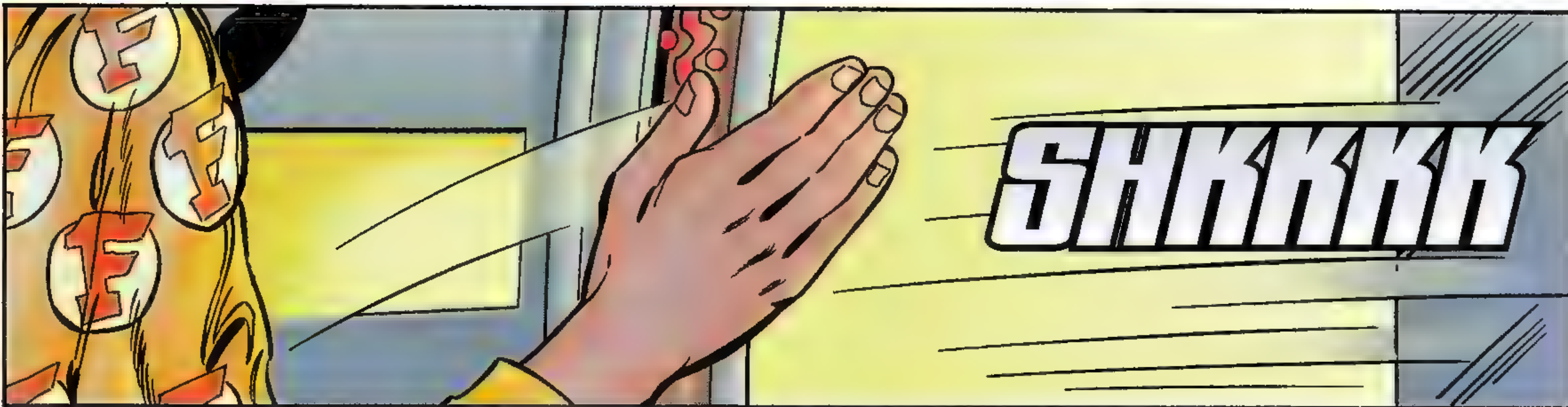
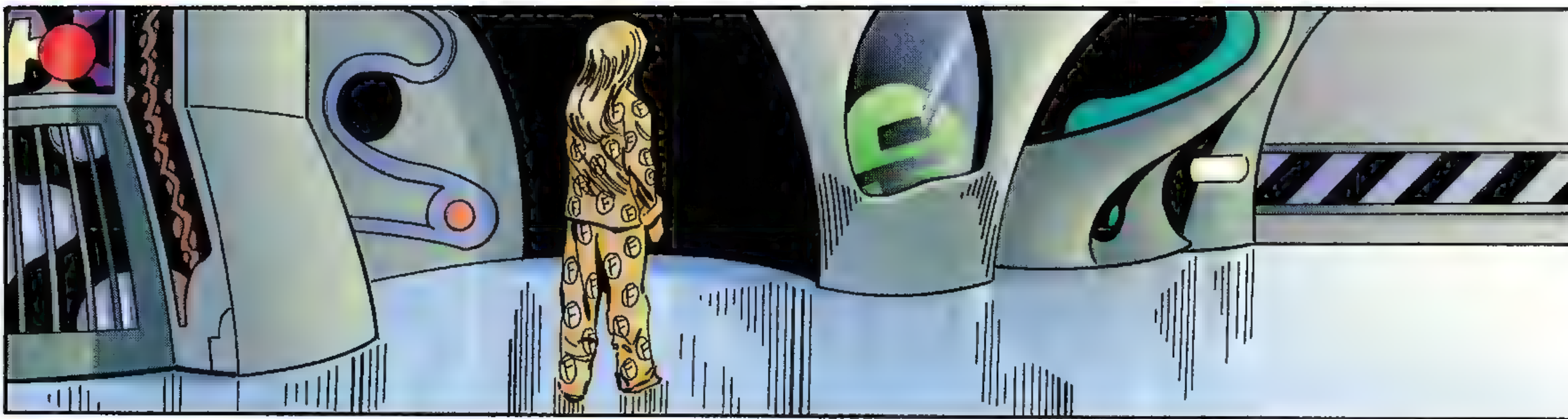
TIME TO
START ANOTHER
BRIGHT, SHINY
DAY!



-- and do
my morning
stuff.

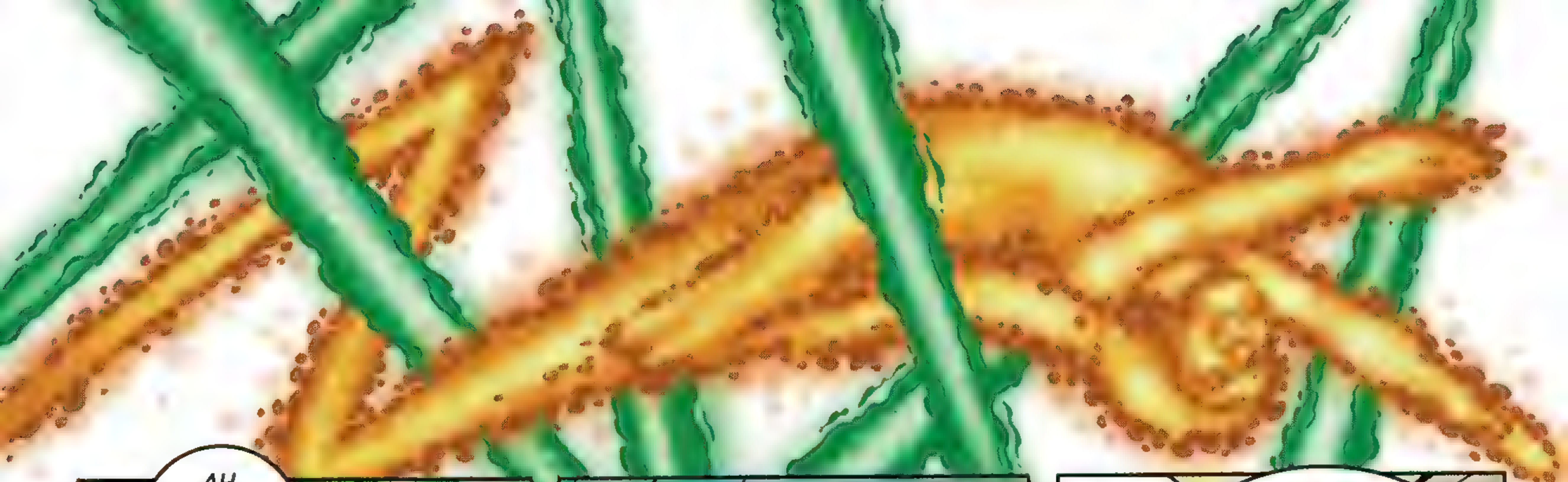
HI,
'RANIUM.
HAVE A GOOD
BREAKFAST.

SHKKKKK



EVERMAY LIFE





AH, THERE YOU ARE, ASTRA!

AFTER YOU FINISH EXERCISING, POP INTO THE BATH AND COME TO **BREAKFAST**, CHOP-CHOP! YOU'VE GOT THAT TV SHOW TODAY!

OKAY, MOM!

Oh, dear, what can the matter be, when it's converted to energy...

WHAT'S THIS STUFF?

IT'S TO HELP INCREASE YOUR **ENERGY-STORAGE** LEVELS. I ASKED YOUR GRAMPA TO MAKE IT **GRAPE-FLAVORED**. IS IT?

IT'S MORE, UM, **MANGANESE-FLAVOR**. BUT THAT'S OKAY -- I'M GETTING TO LIKE THAT...

HERE -- LET ME ADJUST YOUR OUTFIT...

MOMMM! I CAN REPROGRAM MY CLOTHES MYSELF, YOU KNOW!

"HER GRANDFATHER IS DR. AUGUSTUS FURST, ONE OF THE MOST BRILLIANT SCIENTISTS AND DARING ADVENTURERS IN HISTORY.

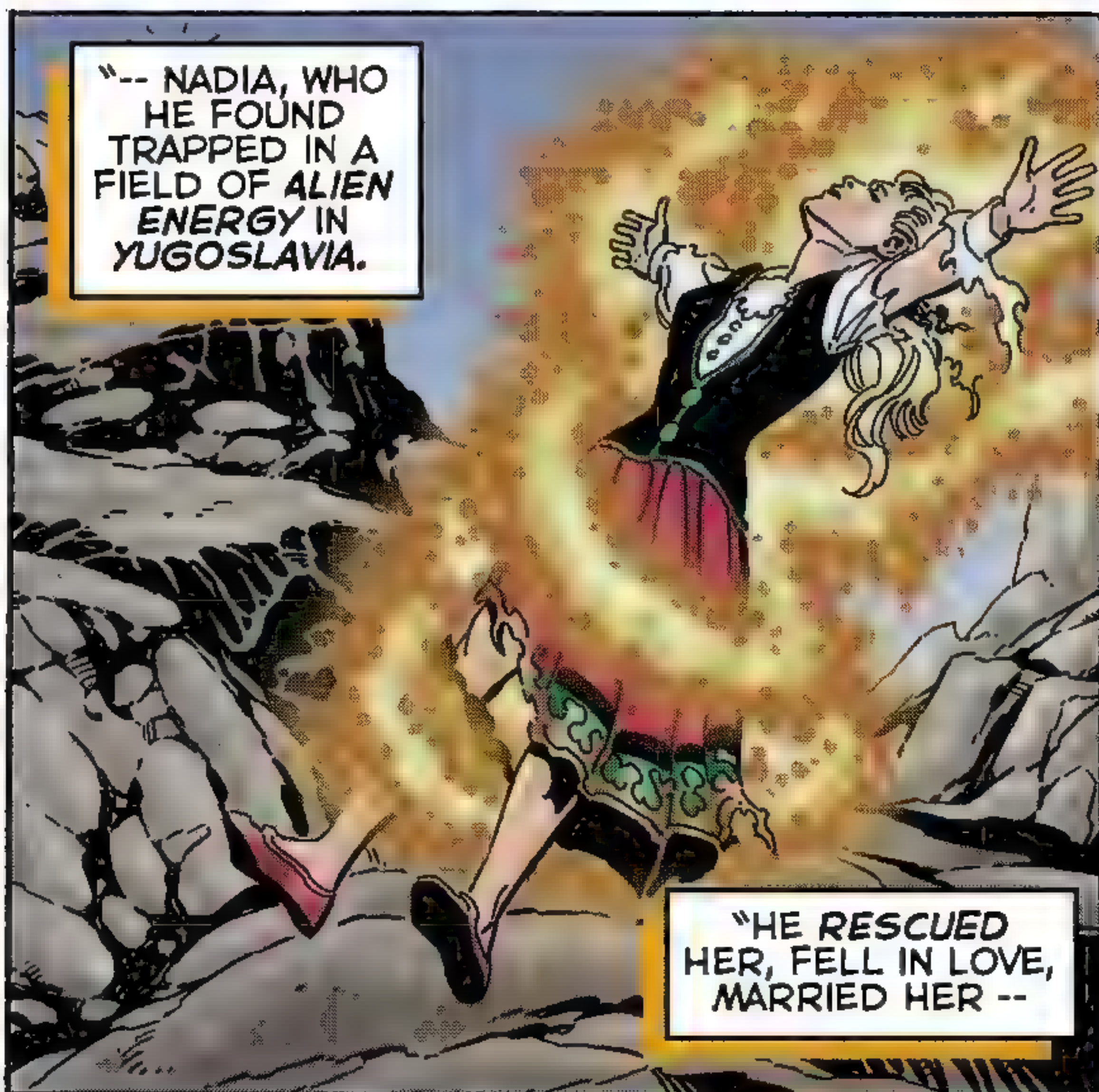


"WITH HIS BROTHER JULIUS, DR. FURST TRAVELED THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURE AND KNOWLEDGE --



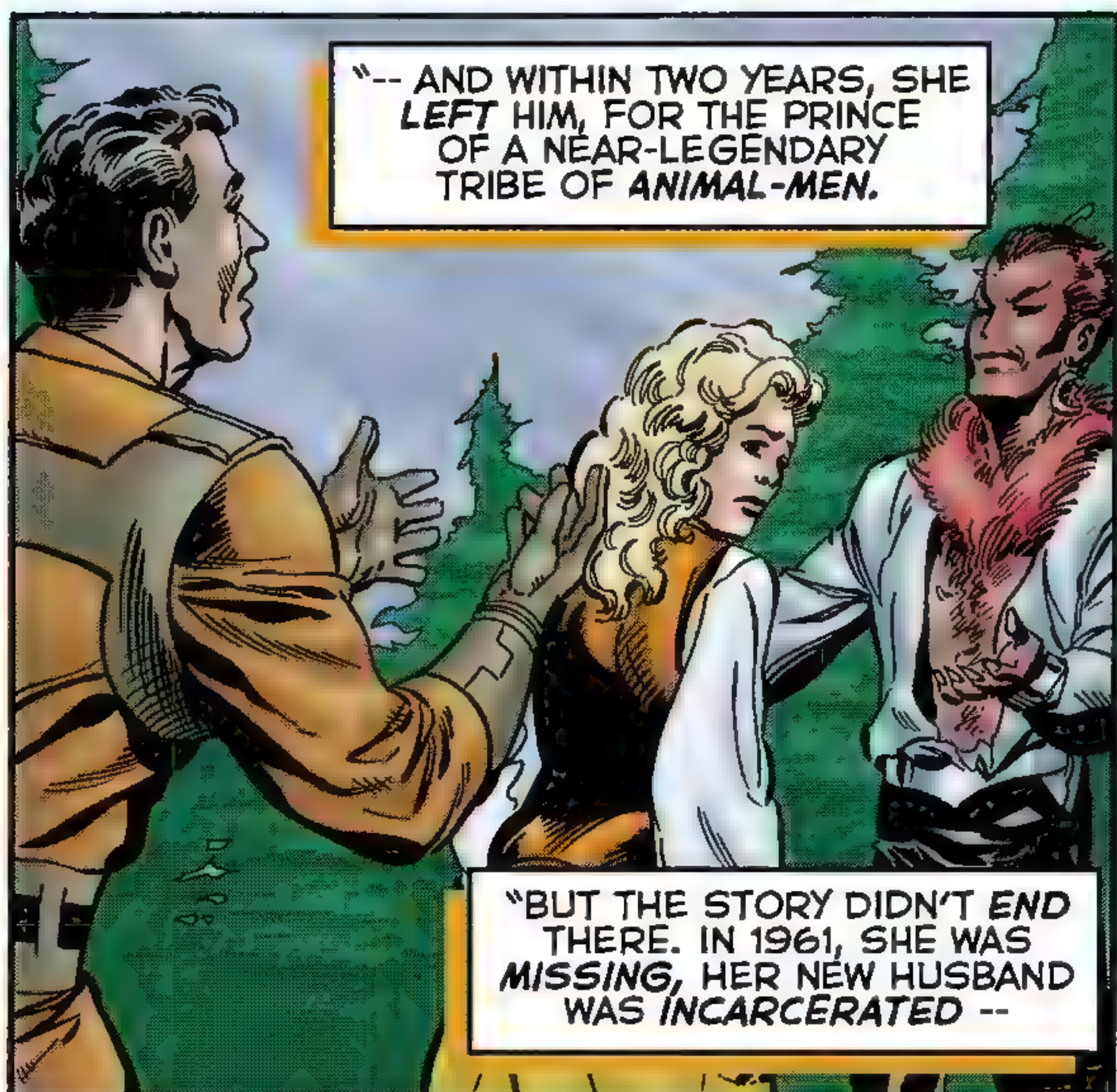
"-- BUT THE TWO OF THEM DIDN'T STAY MERELY A DUO FOR LONG!

"DR. FURST WAS MARRIED, AND DIVORCED, FOUR TIMES. AND IT WAS HIS *THIRD* WIFE, NADIA, WHO CHANGED HIS LIFE THE MOST --



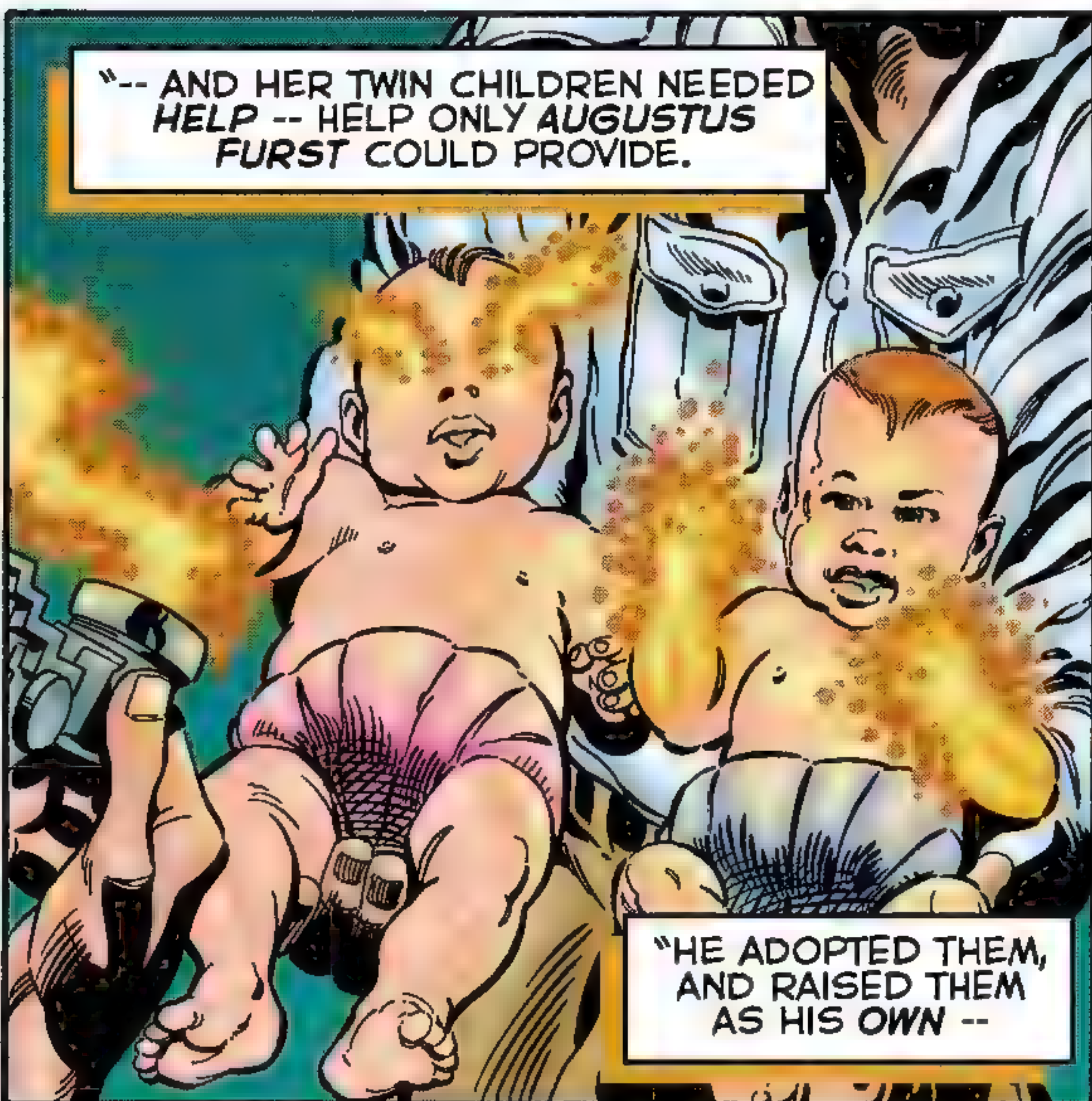
"-- NADIA, WHO HE FOUND TRAPPED IN A FIELD OF *ALIEN ENERGY* IN YUGOSLAVIA.

"HE RESCUED HER, FELL IN LOVE, MARRIED HER --



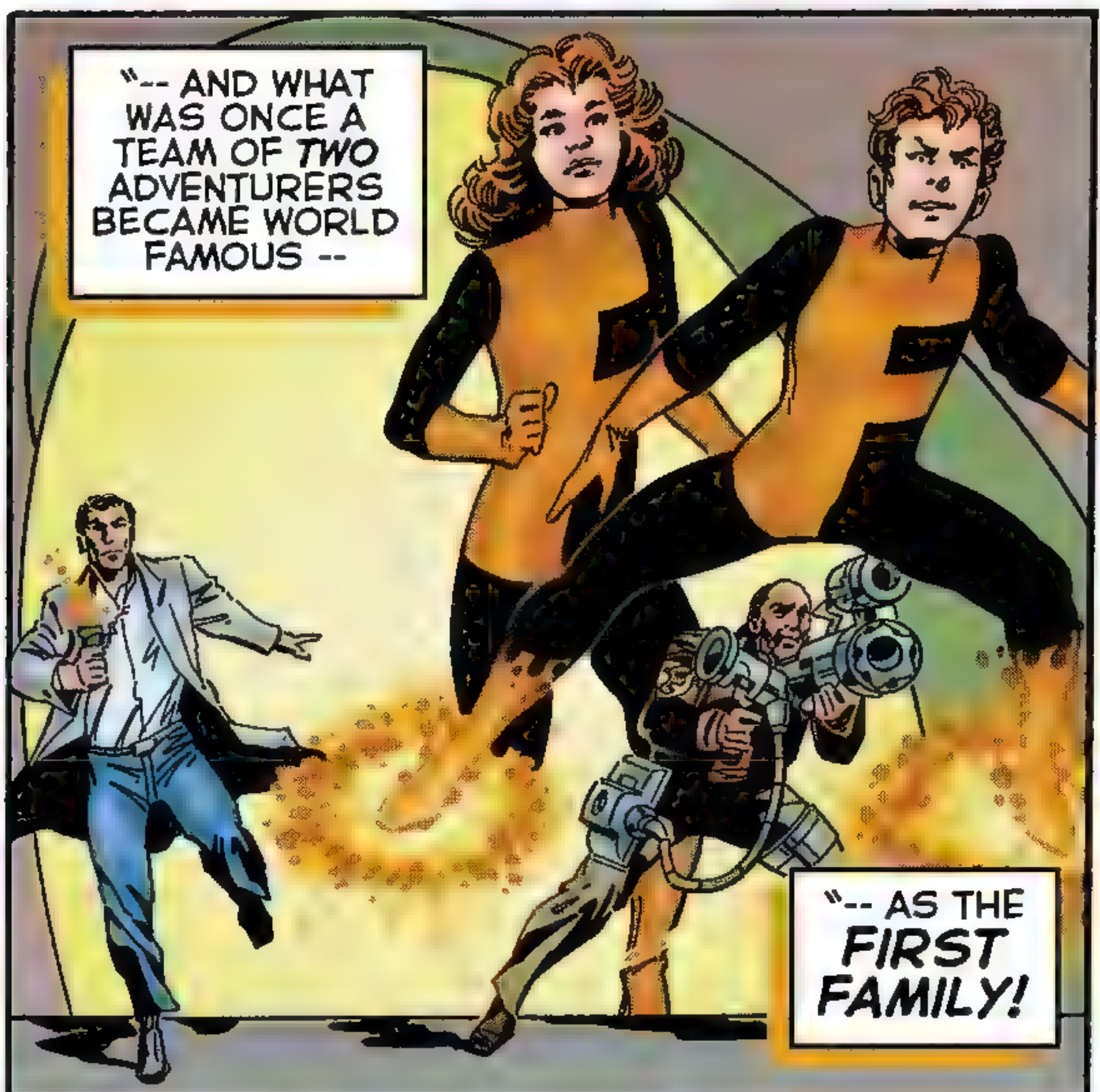
"-- AND WITHIN TWO YEARS, SHE LEFT HIM, FOR THE PRINCE OF A NEAR-LEGENDARY TRIBE OF *ANIMAL-MEN*.

"BUT THE STORY DIDN'T END THERE. IN 1961, SHE WAS MISSING, HER NEW HUSBAND WAS INCARCERATED --



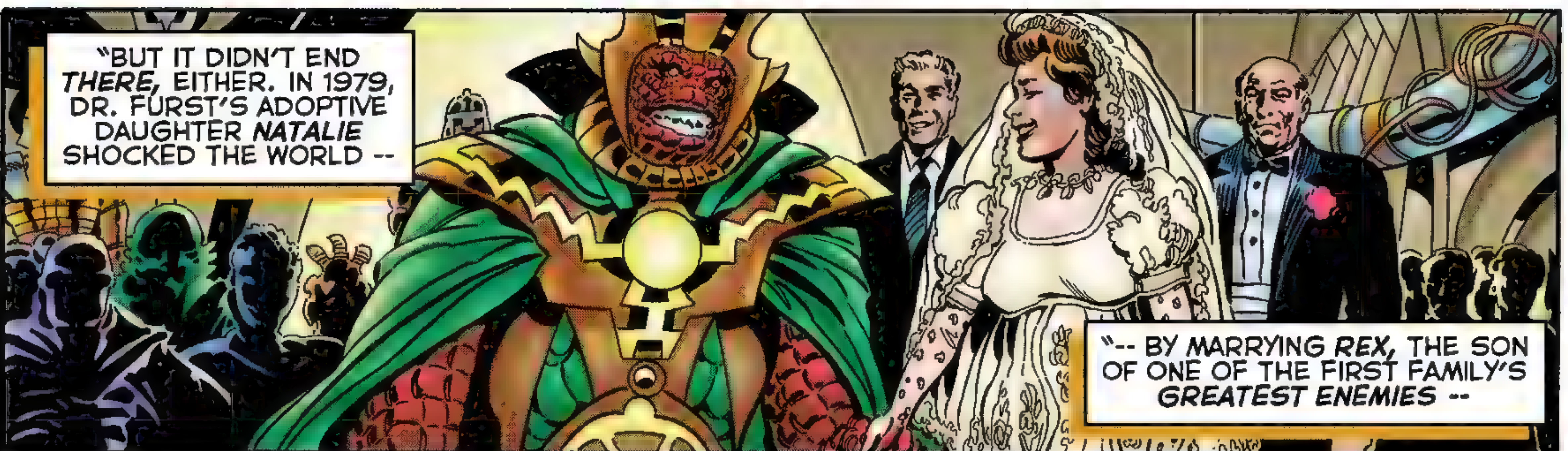
"-- AND HER TWIN CHILDREN NEEDED HELP -- HELP ONLY *AUGUSTUS FURST* COULD PROVIDE.

"HE ADOPTED THEM, AND RAISED THEM AS HIS OWN --



"-- AND WHAT WAS ONCE A TEAM OF TWO ADVENTURERS BECAME WORLD FAMOUS --

"-- AS THE *FIRST FAMILY*!



"BUT IT DIDN'T END THERE, EITHER. IN 1979, DR. FURST'S ADOPTIVE DAUGHTER *NATALIE* SHOCKED THE WORLD --

"-- BY MARRYING *REX*, THE SON OF ONE OF THE FIRST FAMILY'S GREATEST ENEMIES --

"-- AND IN 1986, THEIR
DAUGHTER WAS BORN.
THEIR DAUGHTER ASTRA --

"-- WHO'S NOW THE
MOST FAMOUS, MOST
POWERFUL TEN-YEAR-OLD
GIRL IN THE WORLD --

-- AND
OUR GUEST
HERE IN
THE STUDIO ON
"ASTRO KIDZ
2-DAY!"

I'M
YOUR HOST,
STANLEY TRIPP,
AND IT'S GREAT TO
HAVE YOU HERE,
ASTRA!

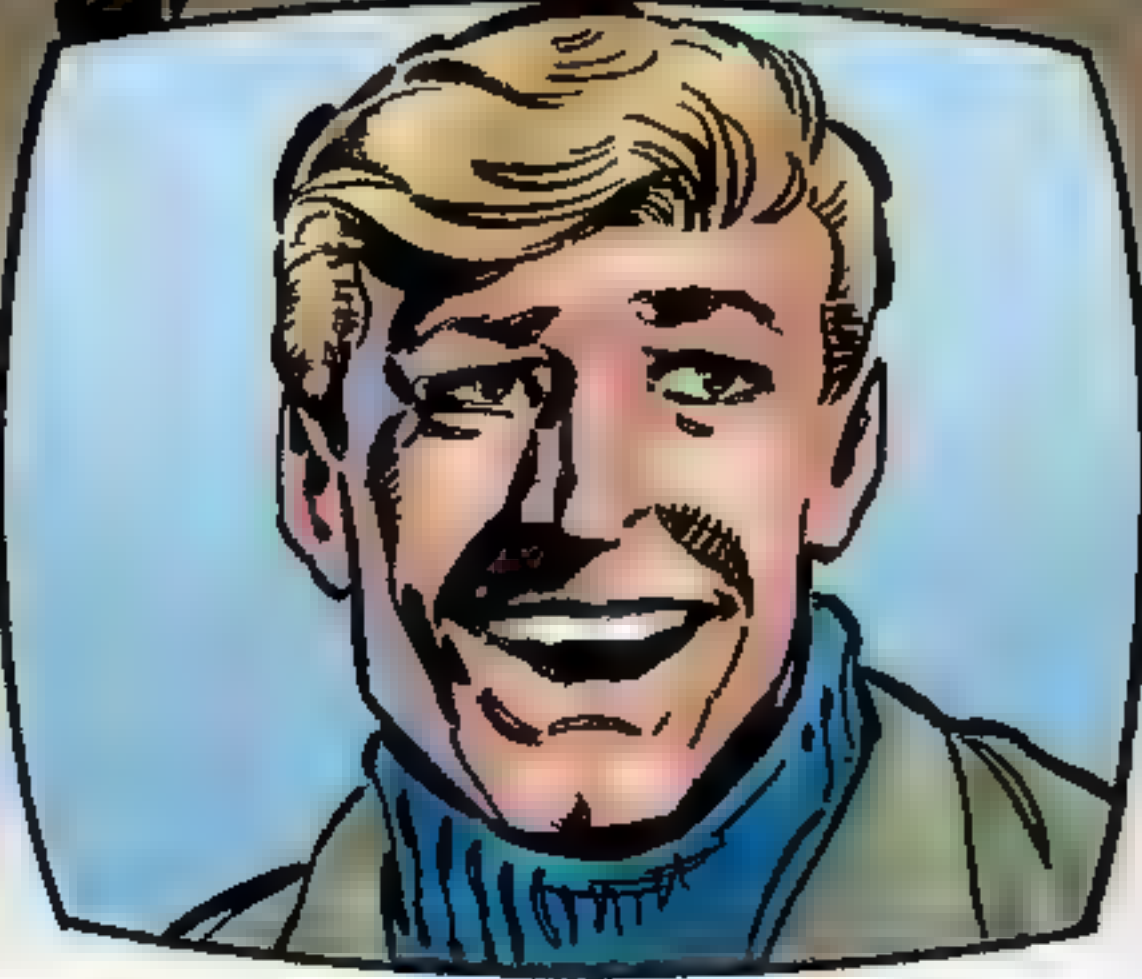
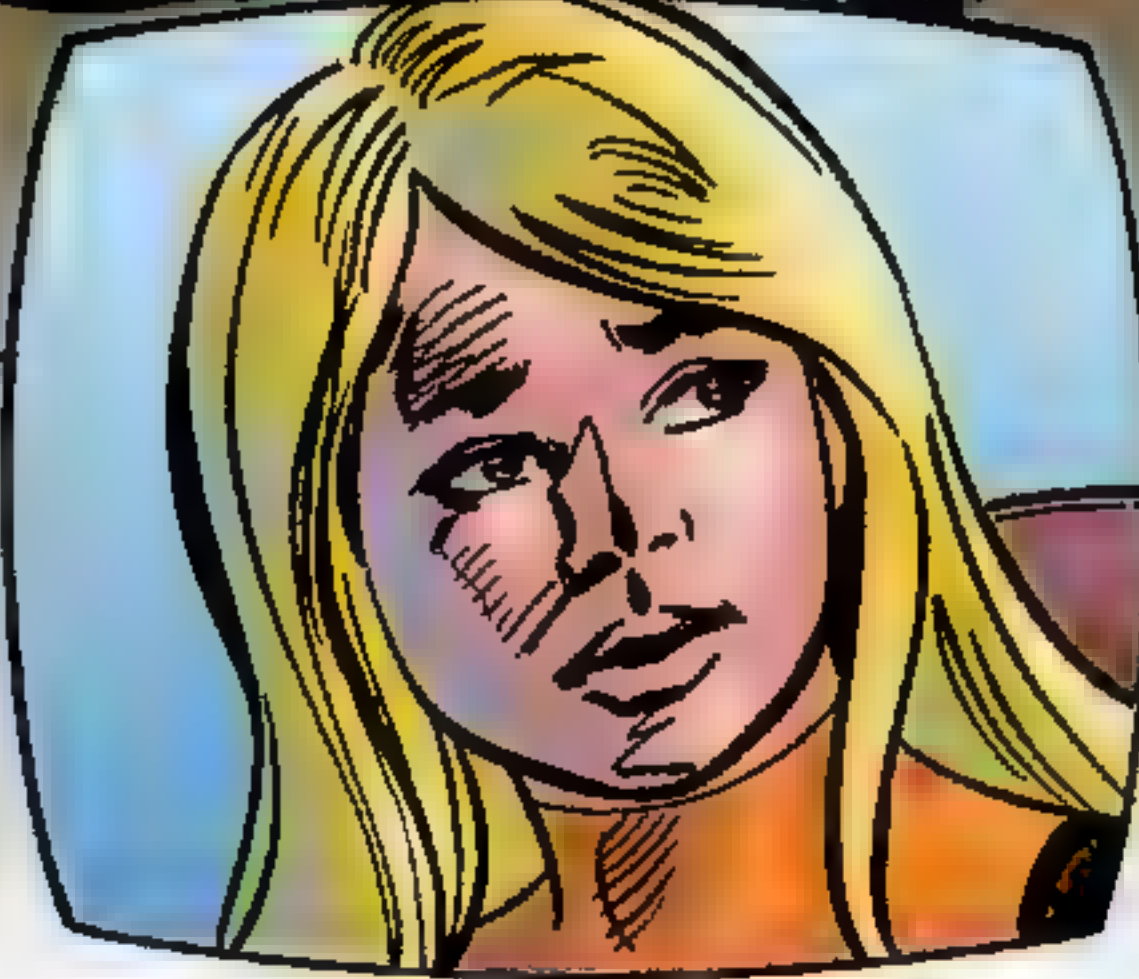
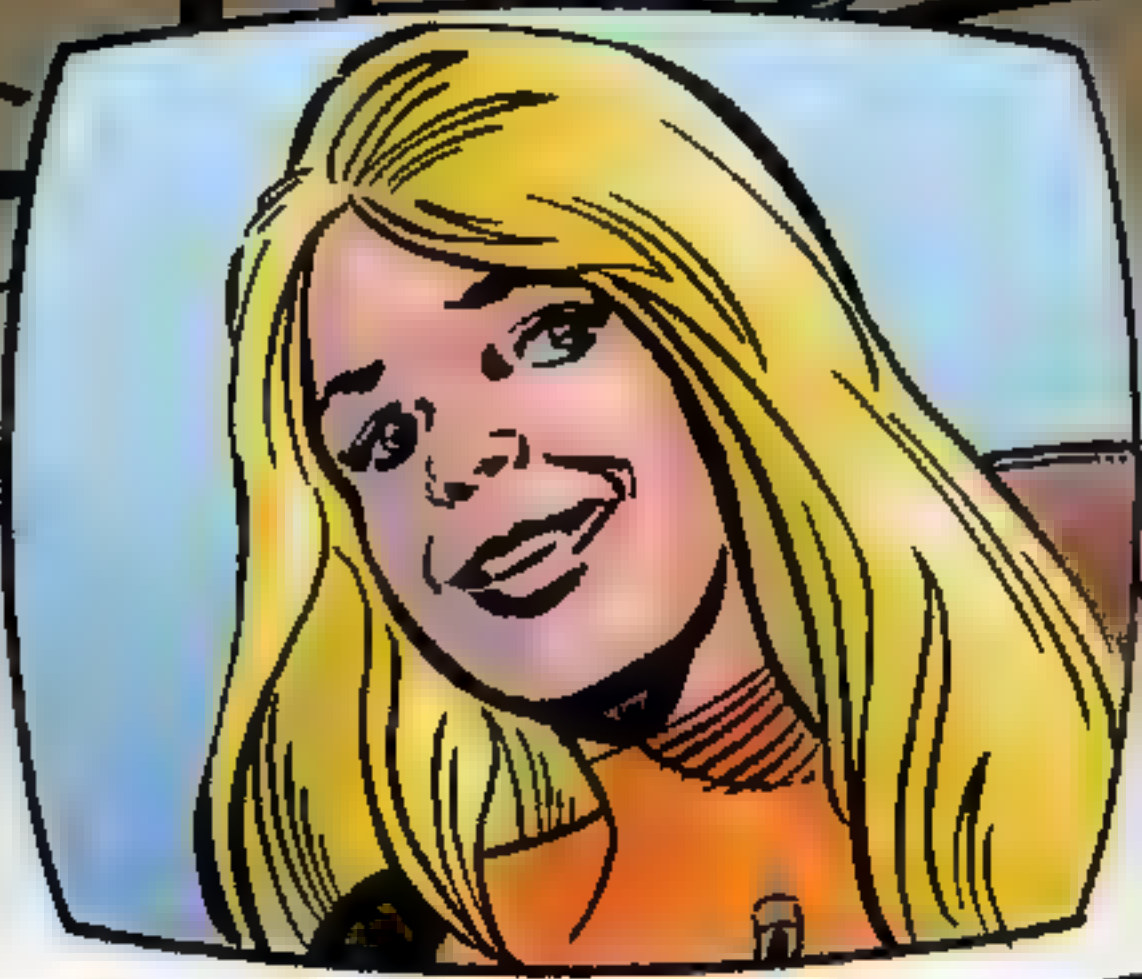
THANKS.
IT WAS NICE
OF YOU TO
INVITE ME, MR.
TRIPP.

GOTTA
ASK -- DID YOUR
MOM TELL YOU TO
SAY THAT?

ASTRO KIDZ
WITH STANLEY
TRIPP 2DAY

WELL...
YEAH.

THAT'S
THE WAY IT
IS WITH MOMS,
HUH? ALWAYS
AFTER YOU TO
MIND YOUR
MANNERS!



SO,
ASTRA, I'M
SURE MOST OF
THE KIDS IN OUR
AUDIENCE ARE
DYING TO
KNOW --

-- DOES IT
FEEL *WEIRD* TO
TRAVEL TO OTHER
DIMENSIONS AND
FIGHT MONSTERS
AND STUFF?

UM,
NOT REALLY.
IT'S FUN,
BUT...

WHAT
ABOUT BEING SO
FAMOUS -- OR HAVING
RELATIVES THAT AREN'T
HUMAN? THAT'S GOTTA
BE STRANGE!

I DON'T
KNOW... I
GUESS...



REALLY.
HEY, I TELL
YOU WHAT -- LET'S
GO TO THE PHONES,
AND SEE WHAT THE
KIDS OF ASTRO
CITY HAVE TO
ASK YOU.

OKAY?

SURE.

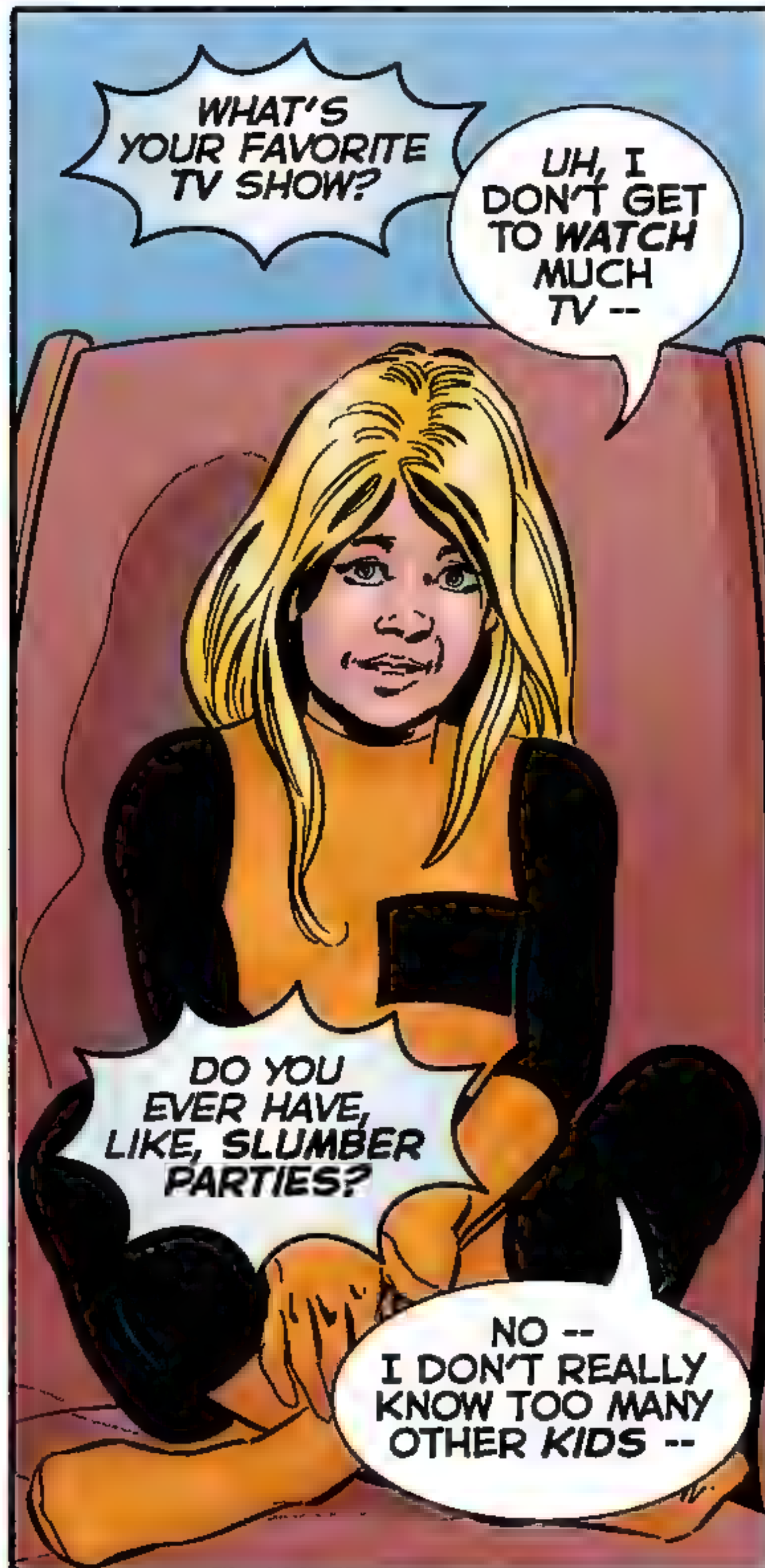


WHAT'S
YOUR FAVORITE
COLOR?

GREEN.

WHAT
GRADE ARE
YOU IN?

I DON'T
GO TO SCHOOL --
I GET TAUGHT AT
HOME. BUT I GUESS
I'D BE IN FOURTH
GRADE.

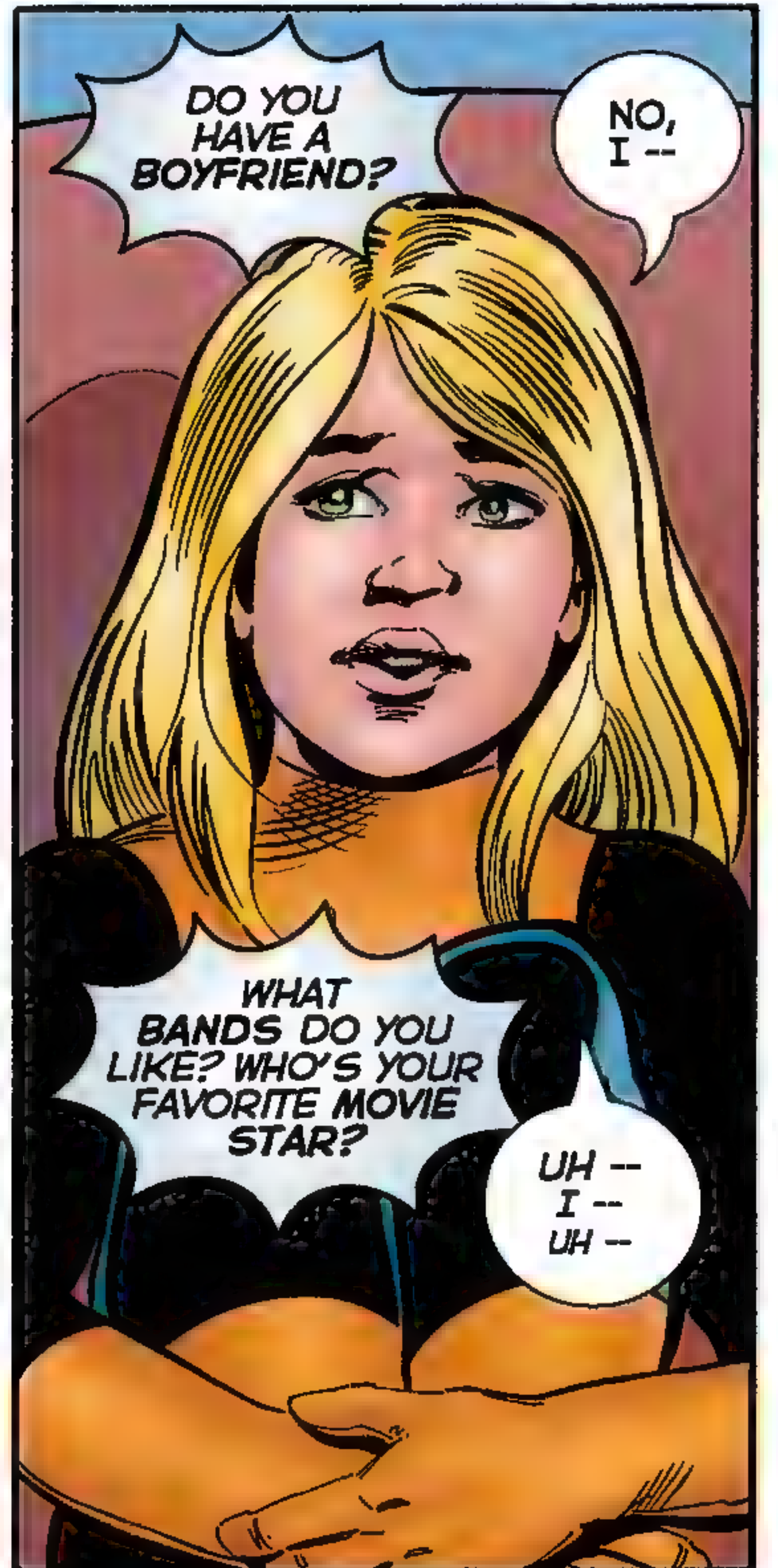


WHAT'S
YOUR FAVORITE
TV SHOW?

UH, I
DON'T GET
TO WATCH
MUCH
TV --

DO YOU
EVER HAVE,
LIKE, SLUMBER
PARTIES?

NO --
I DON'T REALLY
KNOW TOO MANY
OTHER KIDS --

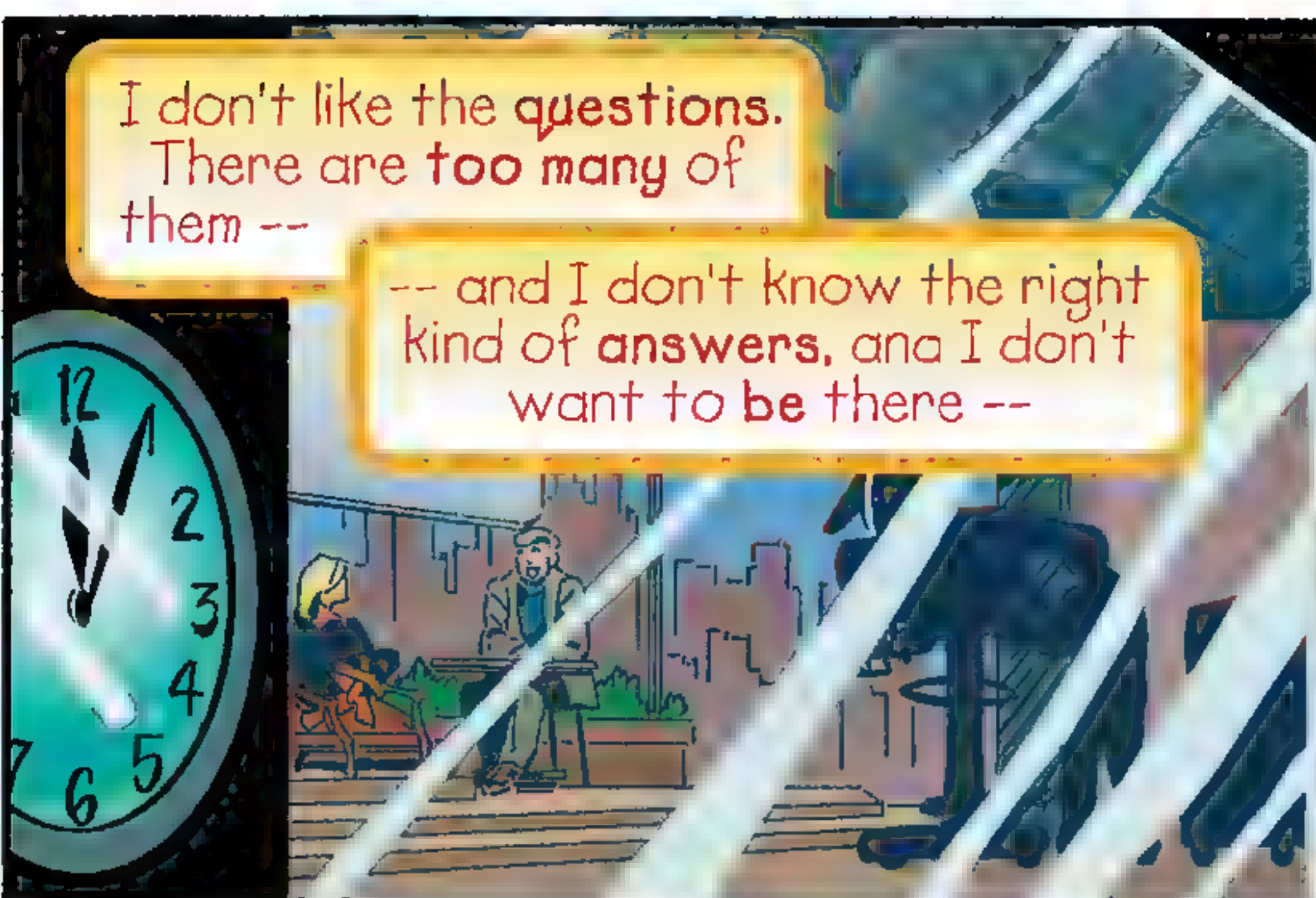


DO YOU
HAVE A
BOYFRIEND?

NO,
I --

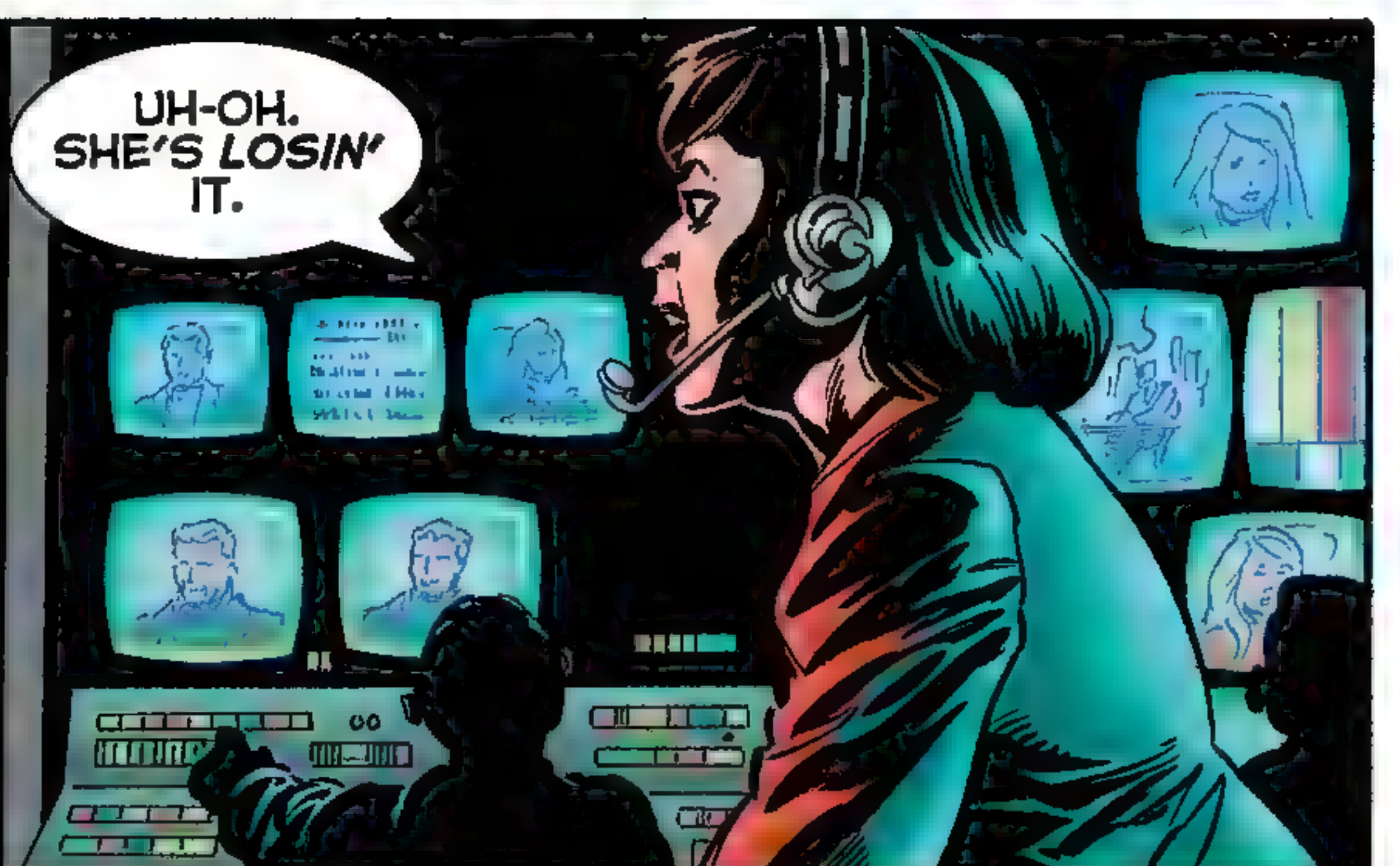
WHAT
BANDS DO YOU
LIKE? WHO'S YOUR
FAVORITE MOVIE
STAR?

UH --
I --
UH --

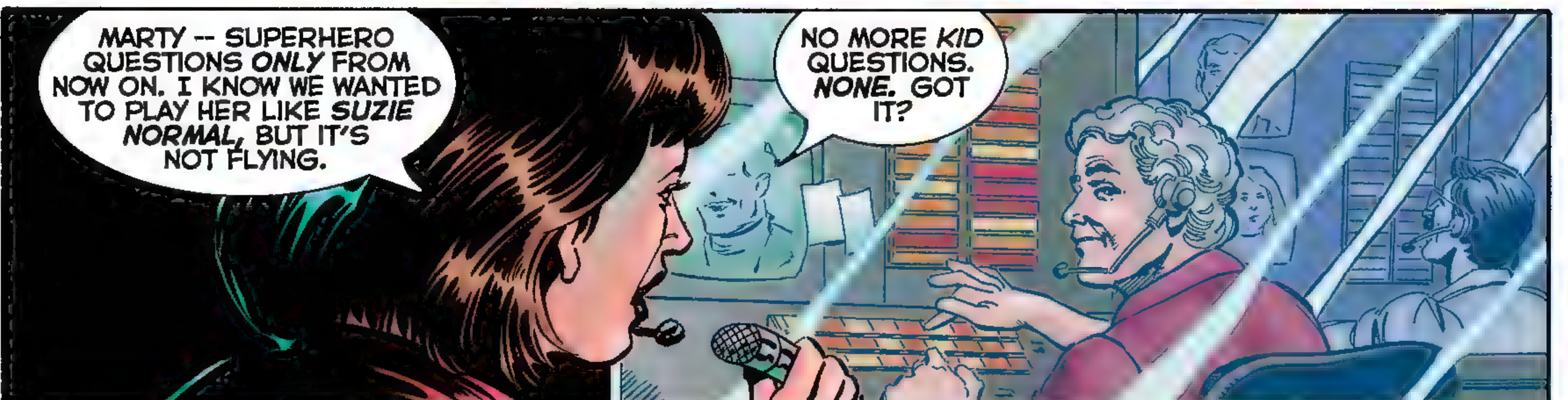


I don't like the questions.
There are too many of
them --

-- and I don't know the right
kind of answers, and I don't
want to be there --

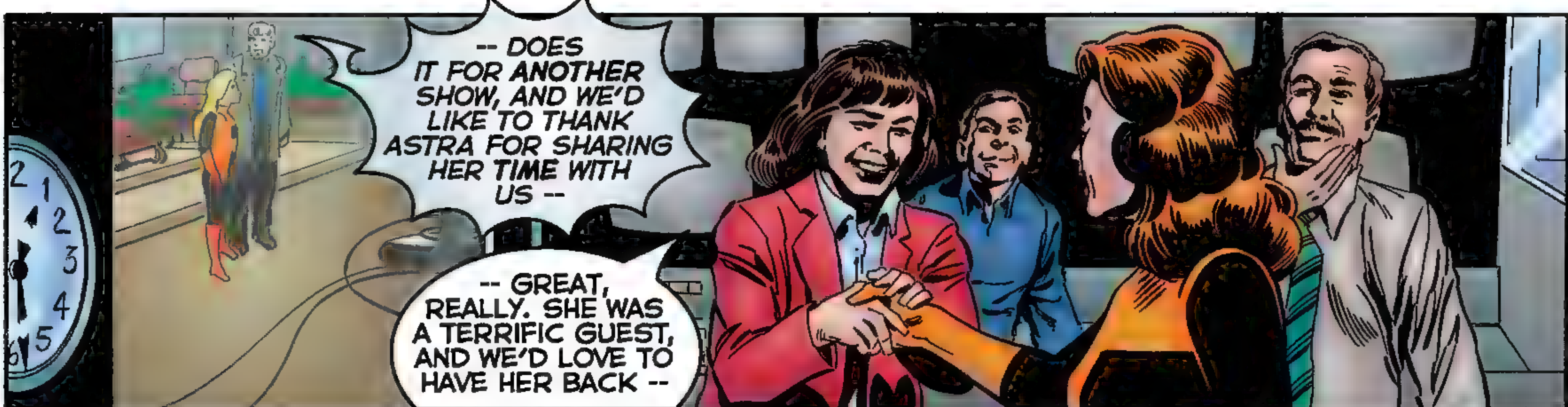
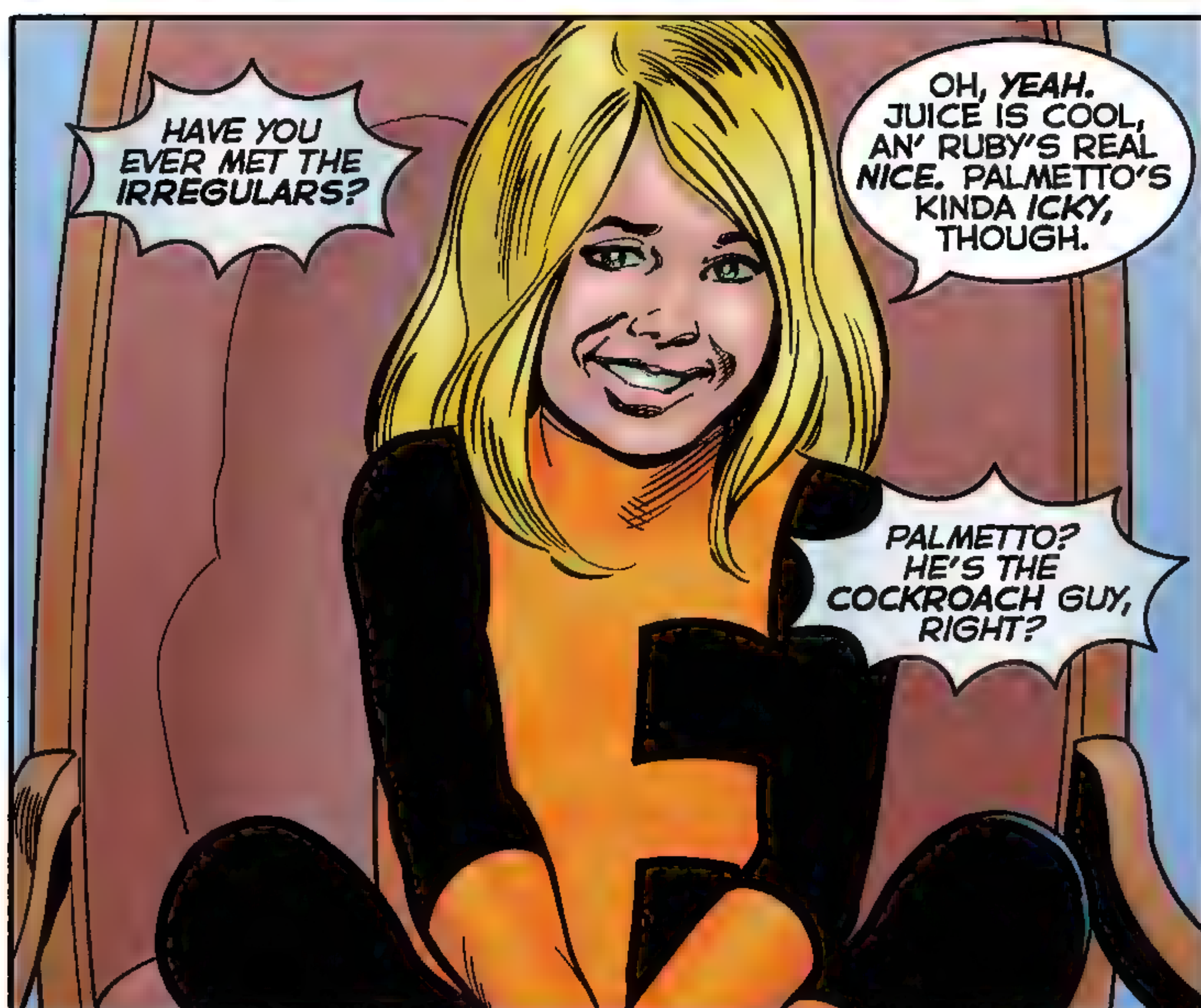
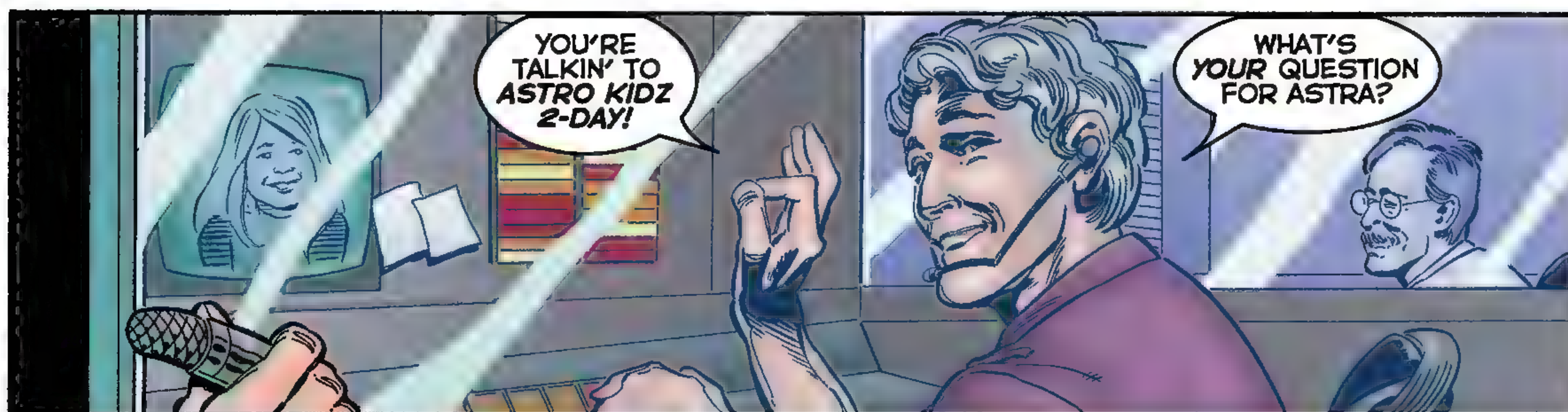


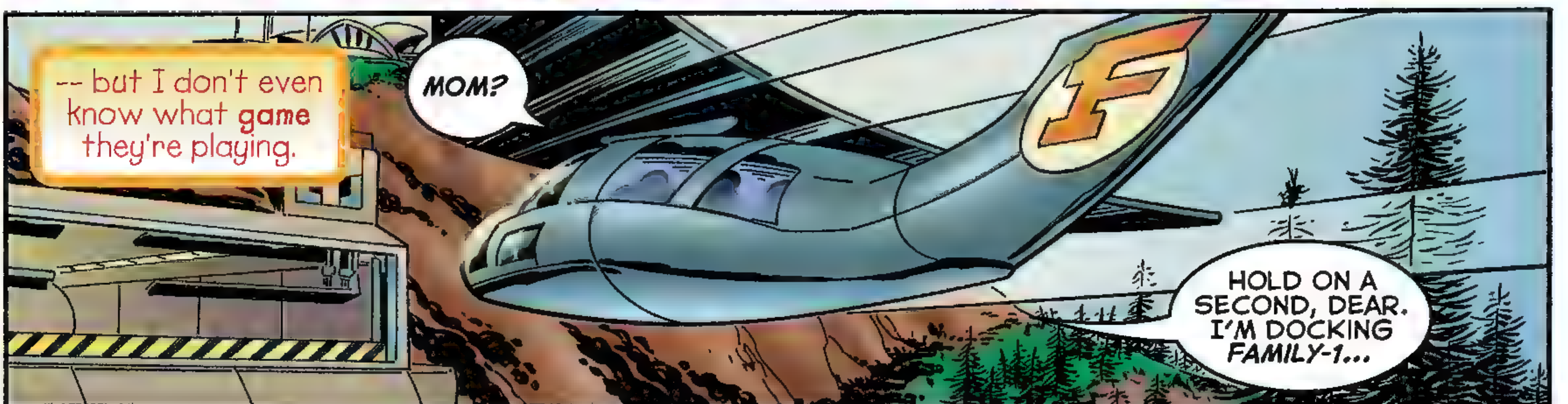
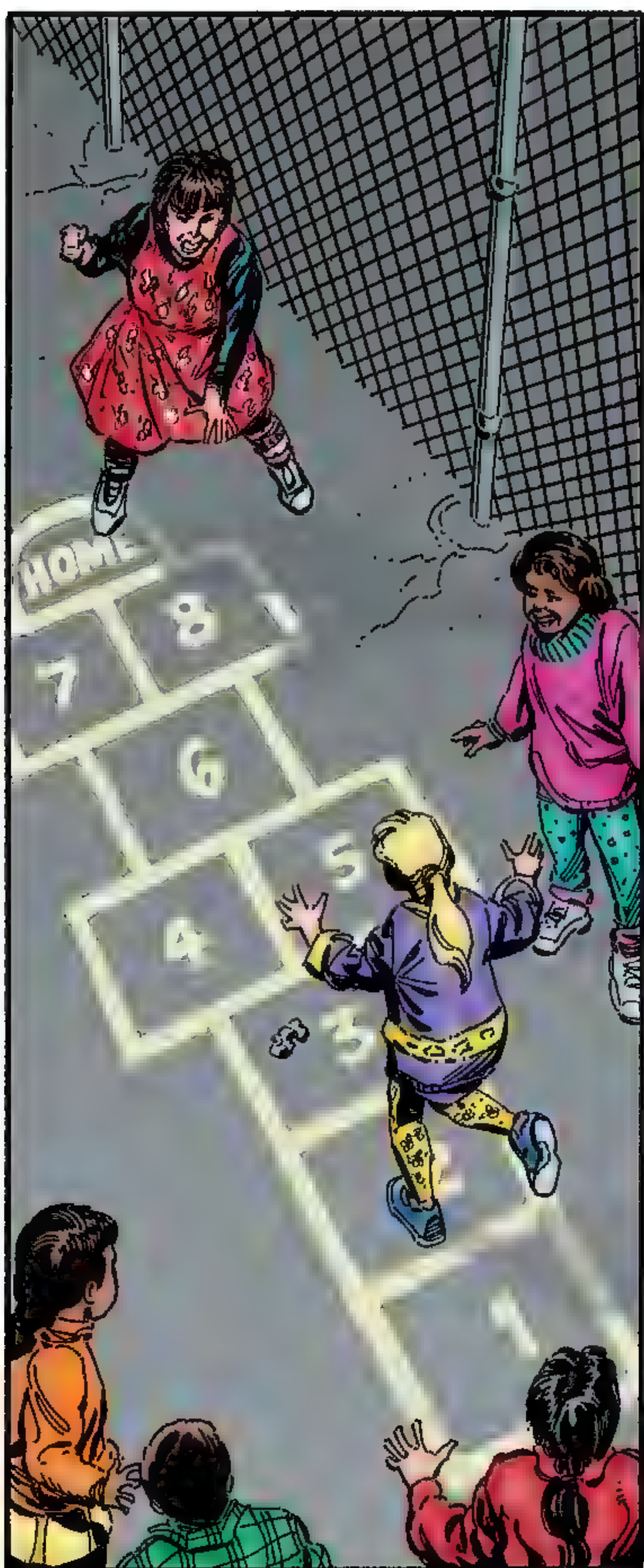
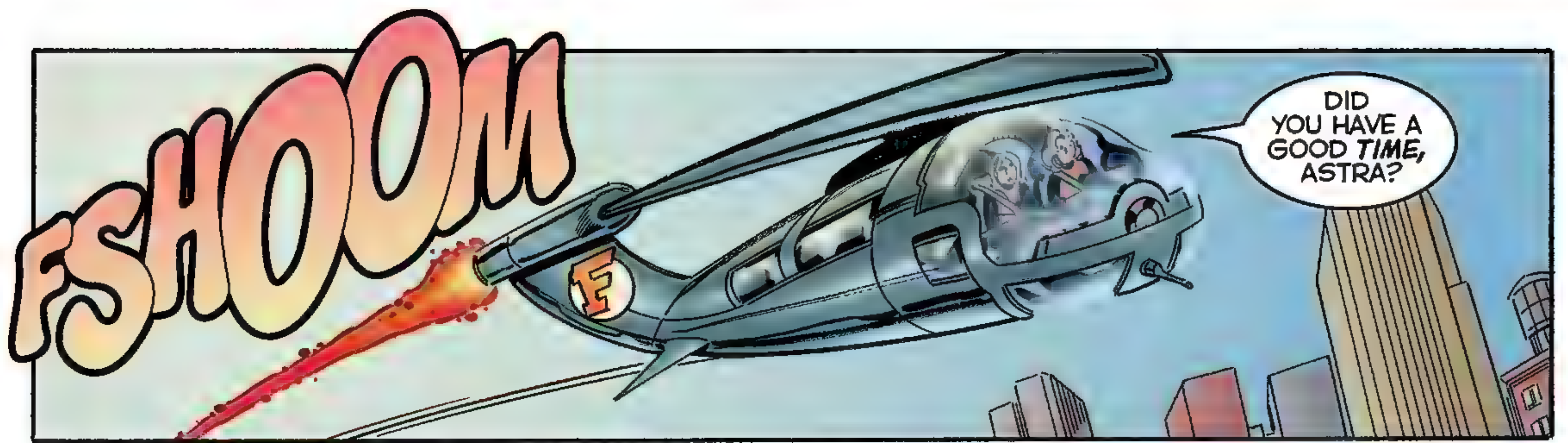
UH-OH.
SHE'S LOSIN'
IT.



MARTY -- SUPERHERO
QUESTIONS ONLY FROM
NOW ON. I KNOW WE WANTED
TO PLAY HER LIKE SUZIE
NORMAL, BUT IT'S
NOT FLYING.

NO MORE KID
QUESTIONS.
NONE. GOT
IT?





BREET BREET BREET BREET BREET



NICK!
NATALIE! REX!
LAB THREE --
IMMEDIATELY! WE'VE
GOT A RUPTURE IN
THE MENTO-
VERSE!

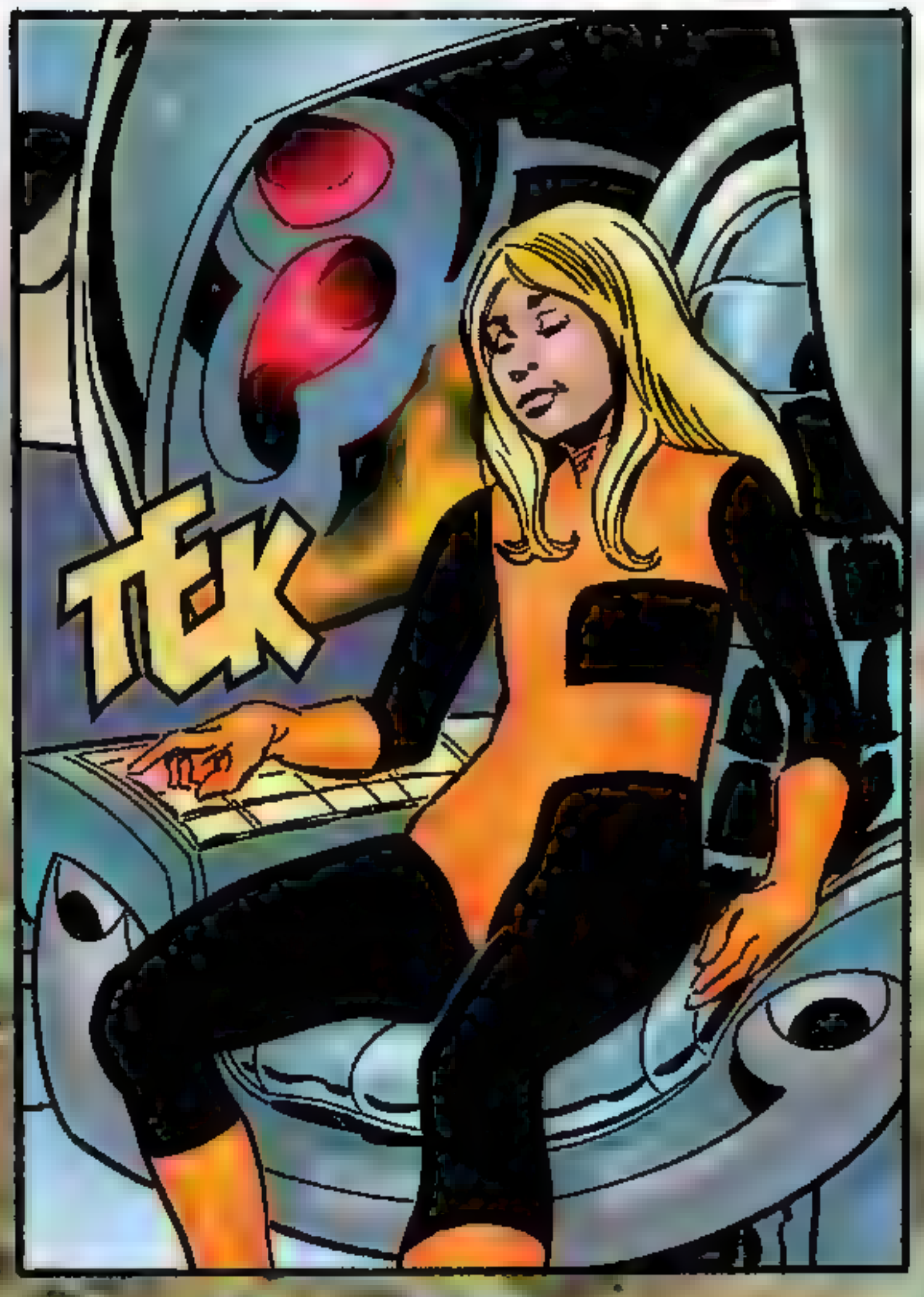
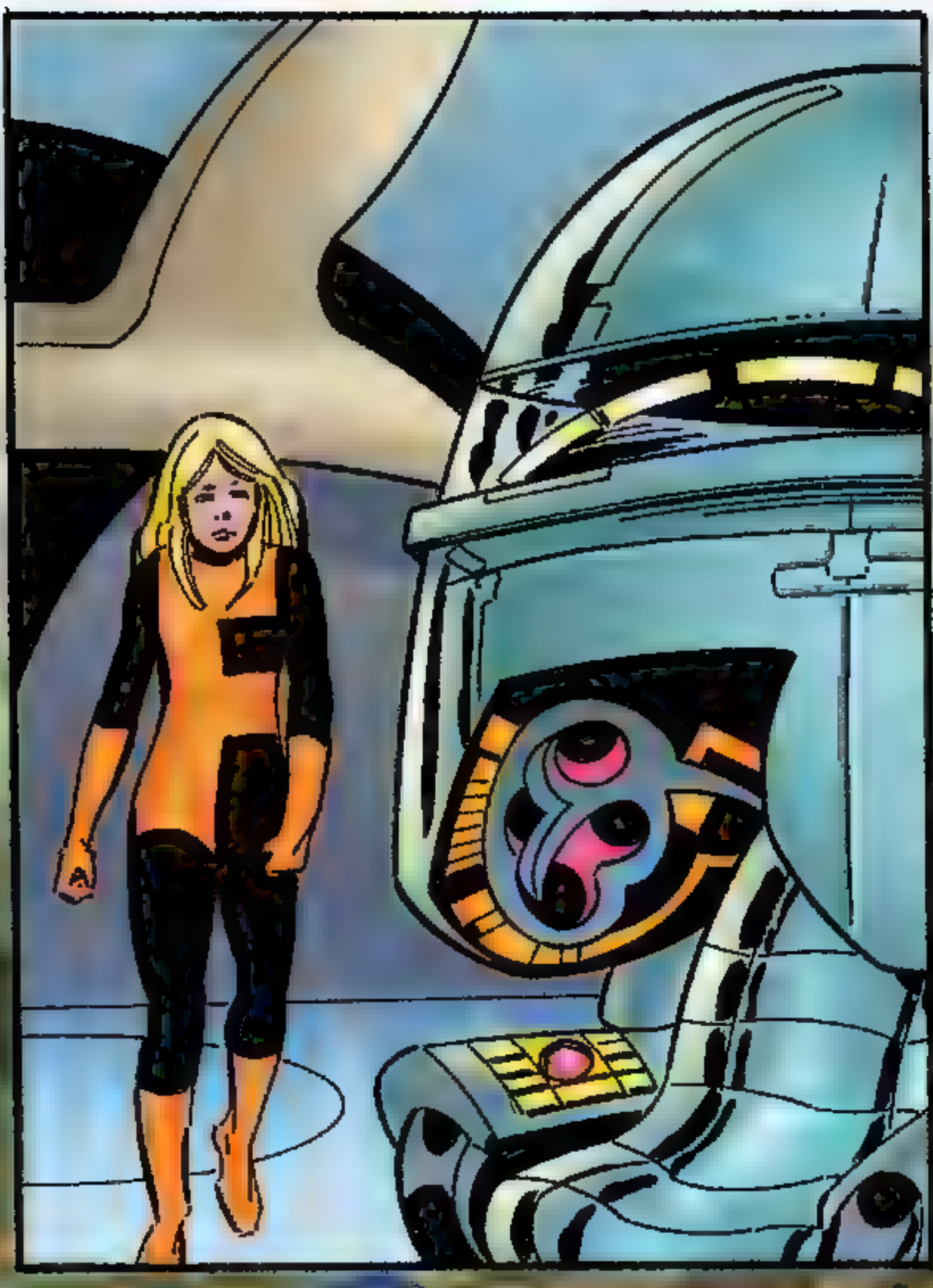
WE'RE
BACK, HON --
YOU CAN SCOOT
INTO THE
BATHROOM
NOW --



-- AND
THEN LOG
INTO SCHOOL,
OKAY? I'LL
CATCH YOU
AFTER!

BUT --
I DIDN'T NEED
THE BATHROOM.
I WANTED --

I
WANTED TO
ASK --



HI,
ASTRA!

HI,
MISTER
SMARTIE.

I'm gonna have to ask Grampa for a new **teacher**. Mister Smartie's cool, but he's kinda for little kids.

Maybe I could have a T.V. character.

Anyway, he's talking about space or **molecules** or something --

-- but I keep thinking about those kids --

ASTRA?
ASTRA, ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?

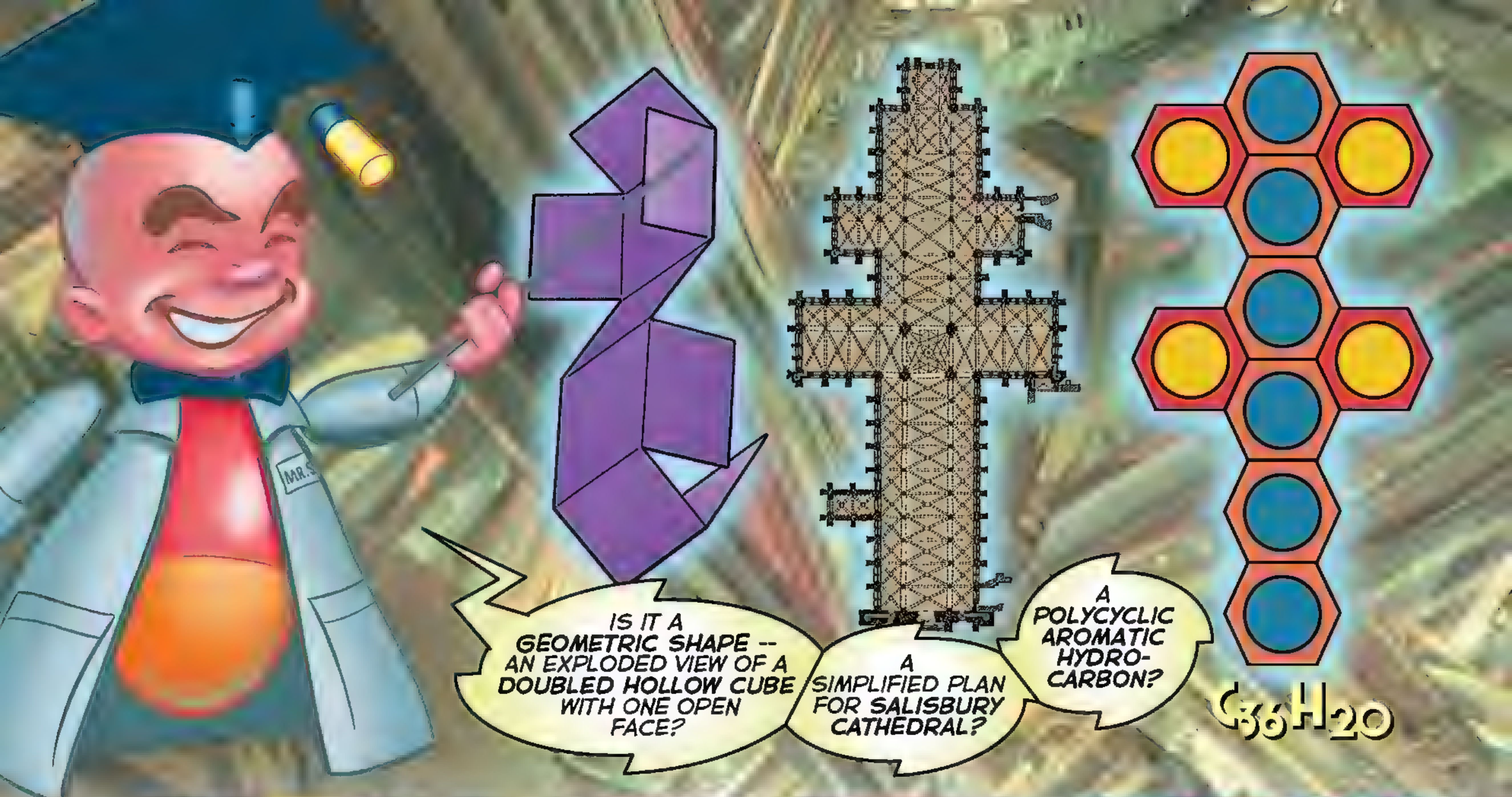
98.6

YOUR VITAL SIGNS ARE GOOD, AND YOU'RE NOT RUNNING A FEVER --

TELL ME SOMETHING, MISTER SMARTIE --

-- WHAT'S THAT?

HMMM -- A POSER, EH?



IS IT A
GEOMETRIC SHAPE --
AN EXPLODED VIEW OF A
DOUBLED HOLLOW CUBE
WITH ONE OPEN
FACE?

A
SIMPLIFIED PLAN
FOR SALISBURY
CATHEDRAL?

A
POLYCYCLIC
AROMATIC
HYDRO-
CARBON?

$C_{36}H_{20}$



NO, NO,
NO! IT'S NOT
A SCIENCE THING,
OR A HISTORY
THING!

IT'S A
KID THING!
IT'S A
GAME!



HMM.
I SEE.

WELL,
I'M NOT
PROGRAMMED
WITH THAT MUCH
DATA ON GAMES,
BUT I'LL DIAL INTO
THE UNIVERSITY'S
DATA BANKS AND
SEE WHAT --

BRETT BRETT BRETT BRETT BRETT



ASTRA
TO HANGAR
BAY ONE!
ASTRA TO
HANGAR BAY
ONE!

-- WE'VE GOT AN
INTER-DIMENSIONAL
BREAKOUT!

SHOO

IT'S THE **SILVER
BRAIN** -- HE'S FOUND A
WAY TO RUPTURE THE
BOUNDARIES BETWEEN
THE **MENTO-VERSE**
AND **HERE** --

-- AND HE'S
EMERGED AT
THE **UNIVERSITY
PSYCH LAB!**

EVERYONE PUT ON
THESE **CEREBRA-CIRCUITS**,
TO PROTECT YOU
FROM HIS MENTAL
DOMINATION.

UM, HE'S REALLY
SERGEI VLATAROFF,
A SCIENTIST WHO
FIGURED OUT HOW TO
GO ALL **MENTAL** --
AN' BECAME PURE
BRAIN.

HE
KEEPS TRYIN'
TO **ENSLAVE**
EVERYONE IN THE
WORLD --

-- BUT
LAST TIME HE
DID, **SAMARITAN**
THREW HIM INTO
THE **MENTO-
VERSE**.

AND
ASTRA -- YOU'VE
BEEN READING
THE **FILES**. WHAT CAN
YOU **TELL** US ABOUT
THE **SILVER BRAIN**?

VERY
GOOD.
ANYTHING
ELSE?

WELL, HE'S GOT NO **BODY**,
SO HE'S ALWAYS GOT
TO WORK THROUGH
SOME KIND OF
UNDERLINGS...

AN'
HOLY CATS,
LOOK WHO
HE'S USING
THIS
TIME --

-- THE GORILLA SWARM!

NO WONDER HE MANAGED TO ESCAPE THE MENTO-VERSE! WITH THE SWARM UNDER HIS CONTROL --

-- HE'S GOT AN INFINITE ARMY OF TIRELESS SLAVES!

AND IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S BUILDING A GIGANTIC VERSION OF HIS OLD NEURAL-NET --

-- BIG ENOUGH TO BLANKET THE WORLD WITH HIS PSIONIC COMMANDS!

WE'VE GOT TO MOVE --

GZUK!

Now!

ASTRA -- MANEUVER EPSILON-SEVEN!

The Gorilla Swarm's a hive-mind -- they all share the same thoughts.

-- an' they go berserk!

OKAY! IN THIS STATE, NATALIE AND I CAN HANDLE THEM -- NO PROBLEM!

THE REST OF YOU --

GZAA!

UHRZZ!

So if I disrupt their transmissions, they're not organized any more --

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

SCHOOL PSYCHOLO

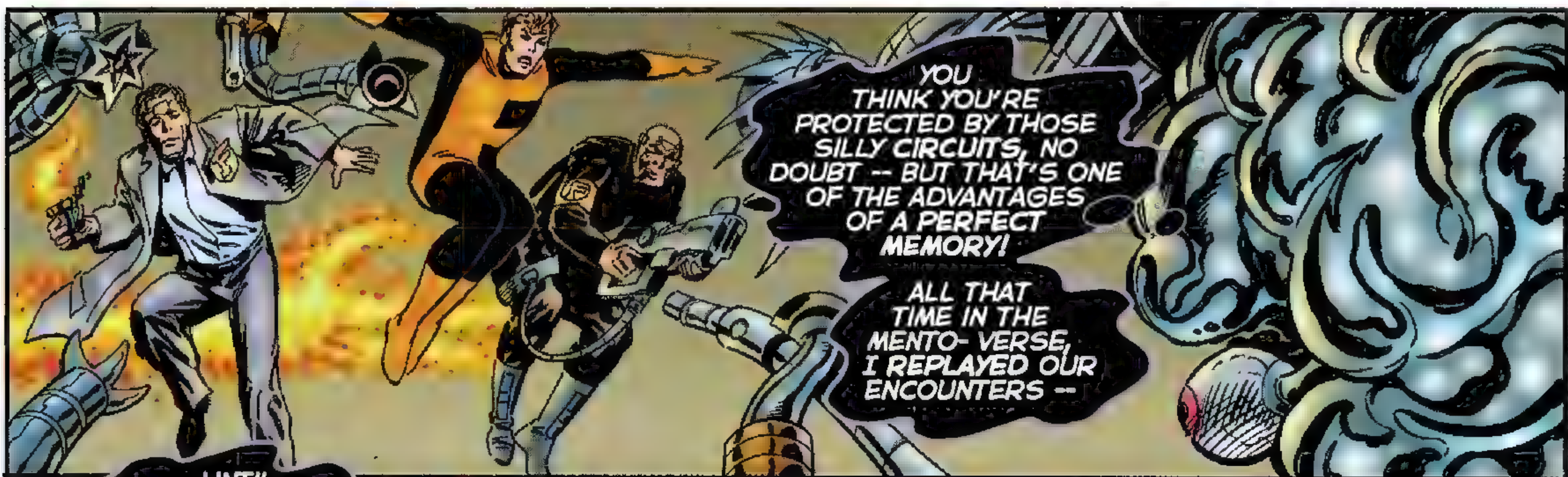
-- GET INSIDE!

JUST HOW I LIKE TO SPEND MY AFTERNOONS --

-- BEING PAWED AT BY INSECT-HEADED ANTHROPOIDS!



AH,
DR. FURST
AND HIS
EXTENDED
BROOD!



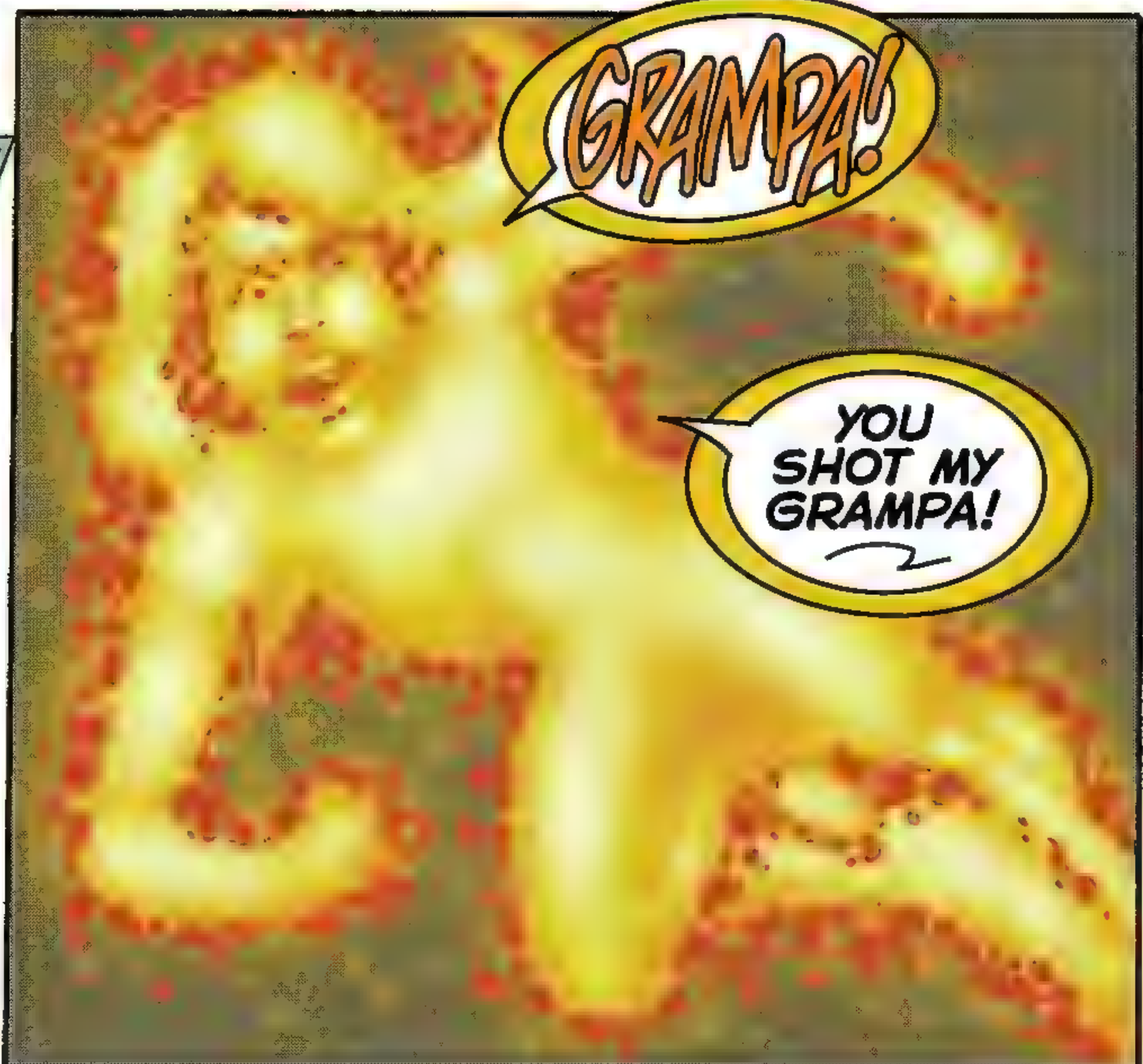
YOU
THINK YOU'RE
PROTECTED BY THOSE
SILLY CIRCUITS, NO
DOUBT -- BUT THAT'S ONE
OF THE ADVANTAGES
OF A PERFECT
MEMORY!

ALL THAT
TIME IN THE
MENTO-VERSE,
I REPLAYED OUR
ENCOUNTERS --

-- UNTIL
I DEDUCED
YOUR CIRCUITS'
FREQUENCY!



GUS?!



GRAMPA!

YOU
SHOT MY
GRAMPA!



ASTRA,
WAIT! YOU'VE
FORGOTTEN
THE BRAIN'S
LAST LINE OF
DEFENSE --



-- THE
**ANTI-
BODIES!**

ASTRA,
YOU CAN'T
JUST **BLAST**
THROUGH
THEM -- THEY'RE
ENERGY-BEINGS
THEM-
SELVES --



-- AND
THEY CAN
GRAB HOLD
OF YOU!

Yeah,
duh!



ASTRA!

WE'LL
GETCHA
BACK,
KID!

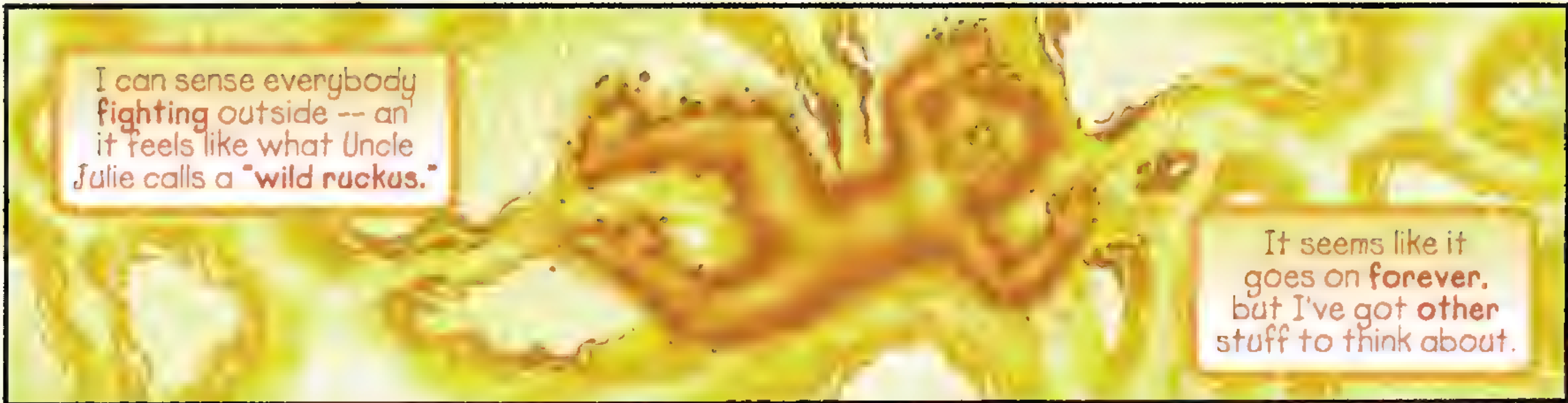


Uncle Nick an' Uncle Julie are
the ones who've forgotten
what the Anti-Bodies do.

They grab on'to
the energy-plasts,
just like they do
any loose energy --
take us all to the
power core --



-- and
stuff
us in!



I can sense everybody fighting outside -- an' it feels like what Uncle Julie calls a "wild ruckus."

It seems like it goes on forever, but I've got other stuff to think about.



Maybe I don't know about games, an' I don't know about sleepovers and TV shows --

-- but I do know about energy.



I reach out, an' let myself dissolve a little into the energy core --

-- an' I find where the core's powering all of the Silver Brain's stuff --



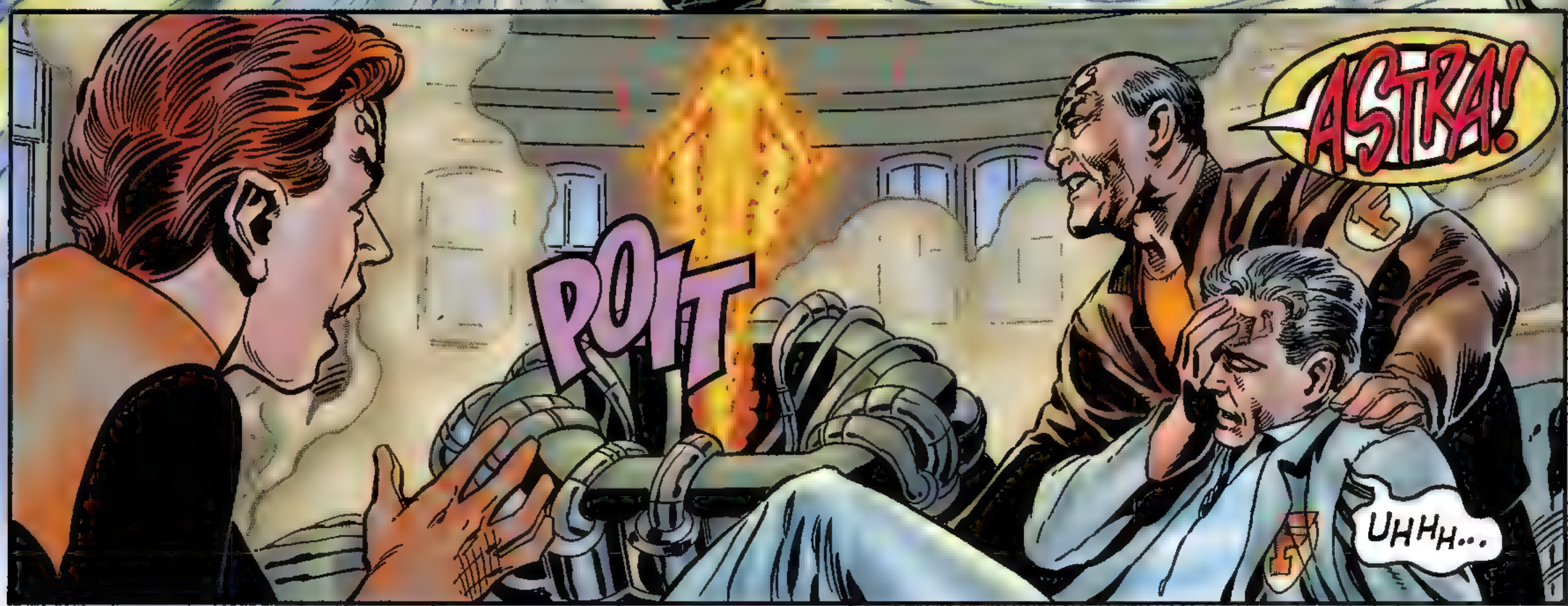
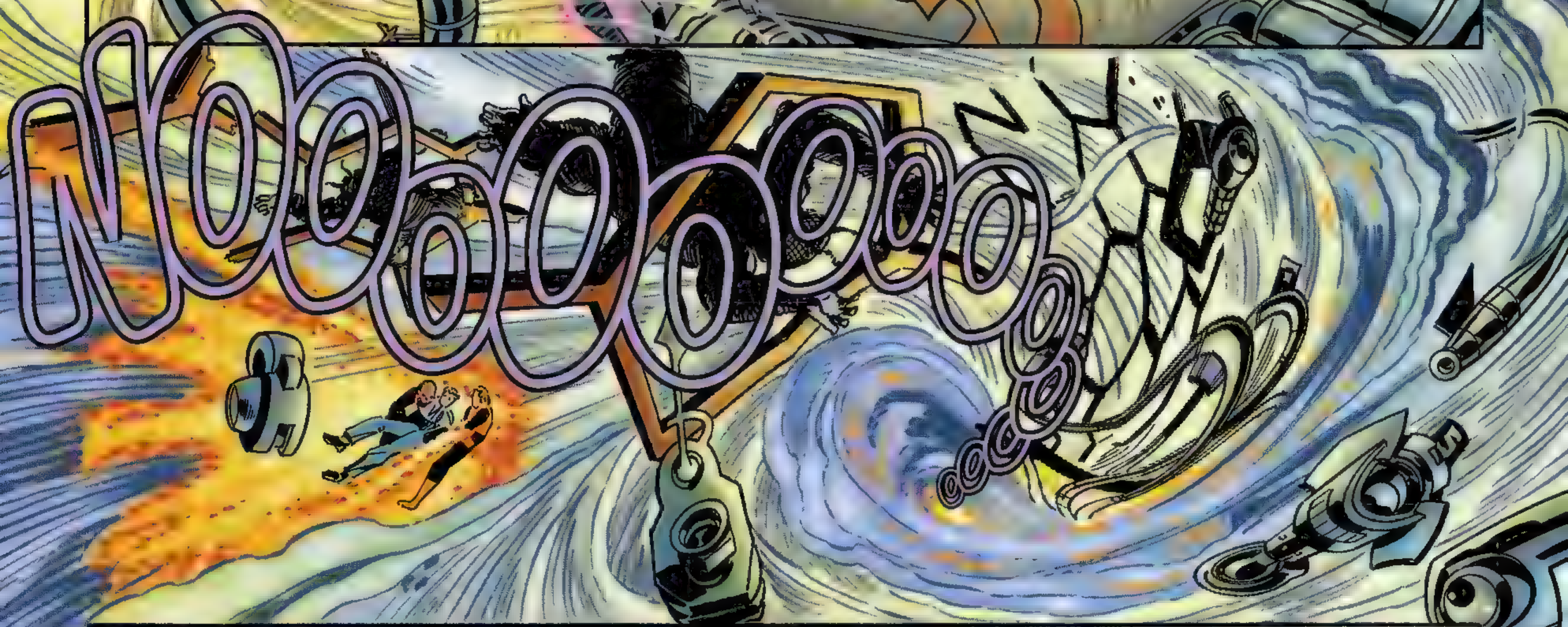
-- an' I shut it all off.

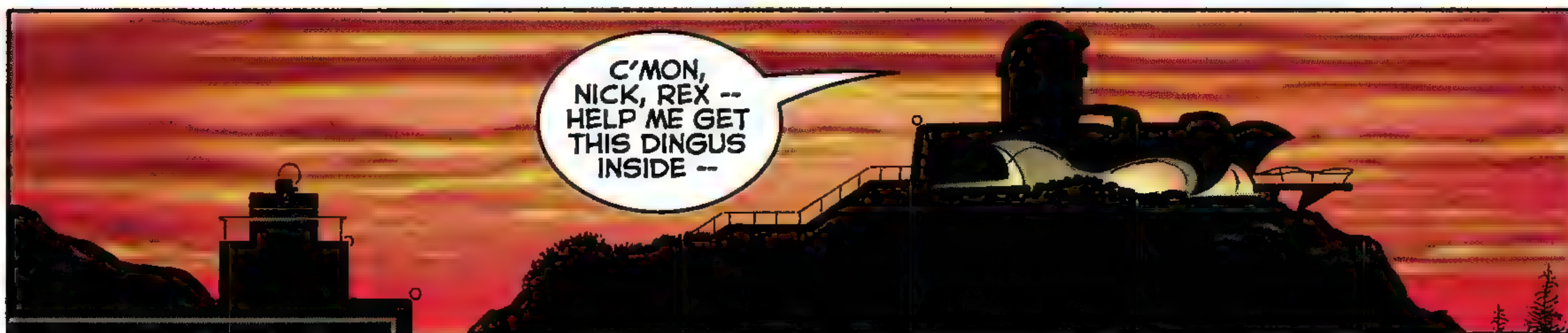
HUH?

WHAT?!

THE DIMENSIONAL APERSTOMUM -- IT'S BEEN DE-ACTIVATED!

CLAK
TLER





C'MON,
NICK, REX --
HELP ME GET
THIS DINGUS
INSIDE --



-- IT'LL
MAKE A DANDY
ADDITION TO
THE TROPHY
ROOM!

FINE, FINE. BUT WHEN
YOU'RE DONE WITH
THAT, JOIN ME IN
LAB THREE --

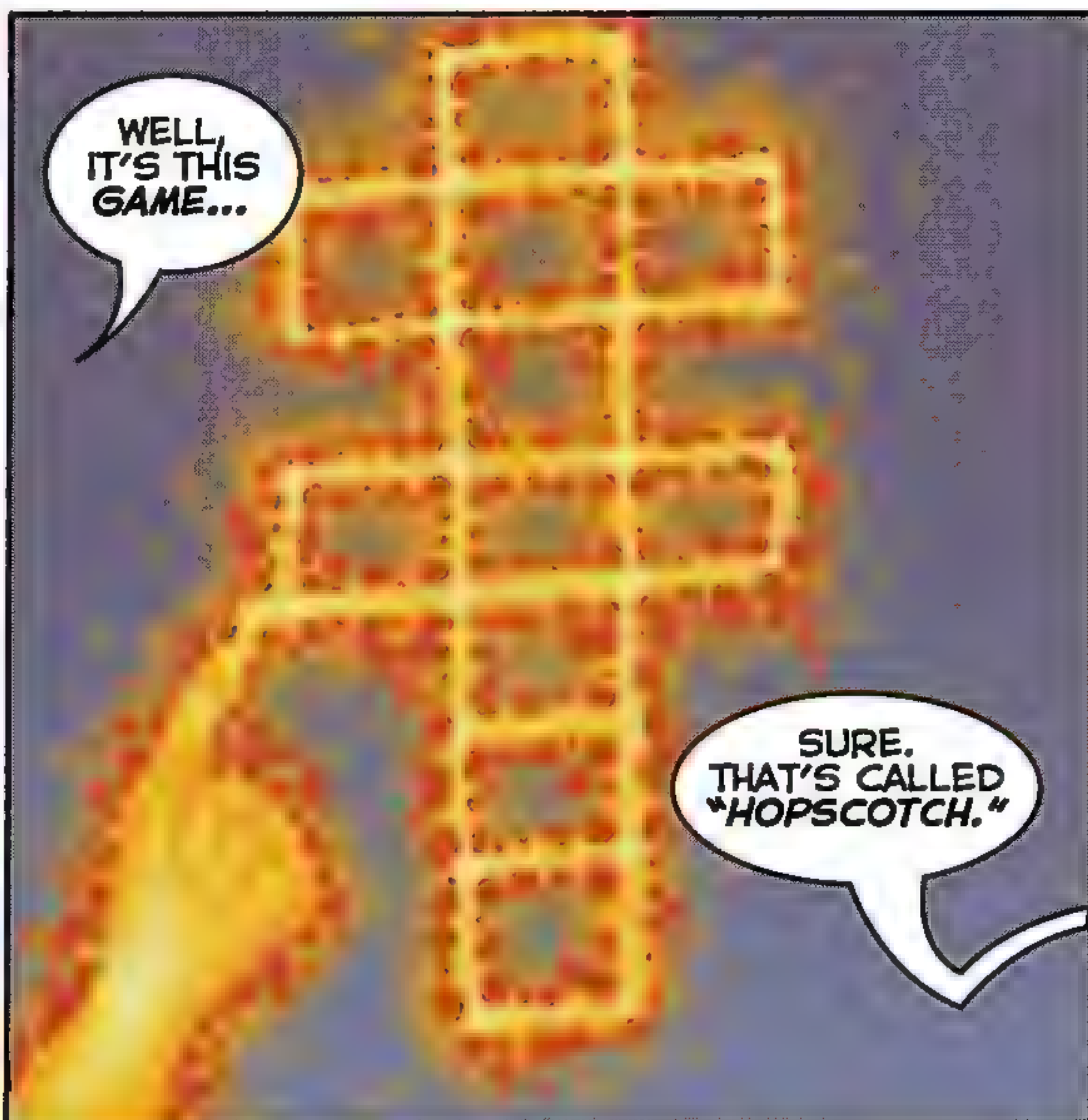
-- WE'VE
GOT TO SEAL
OFF THE BREACH IN
THE MENTO-VERSE --
PERMANENTLY!

UH,
MOM?



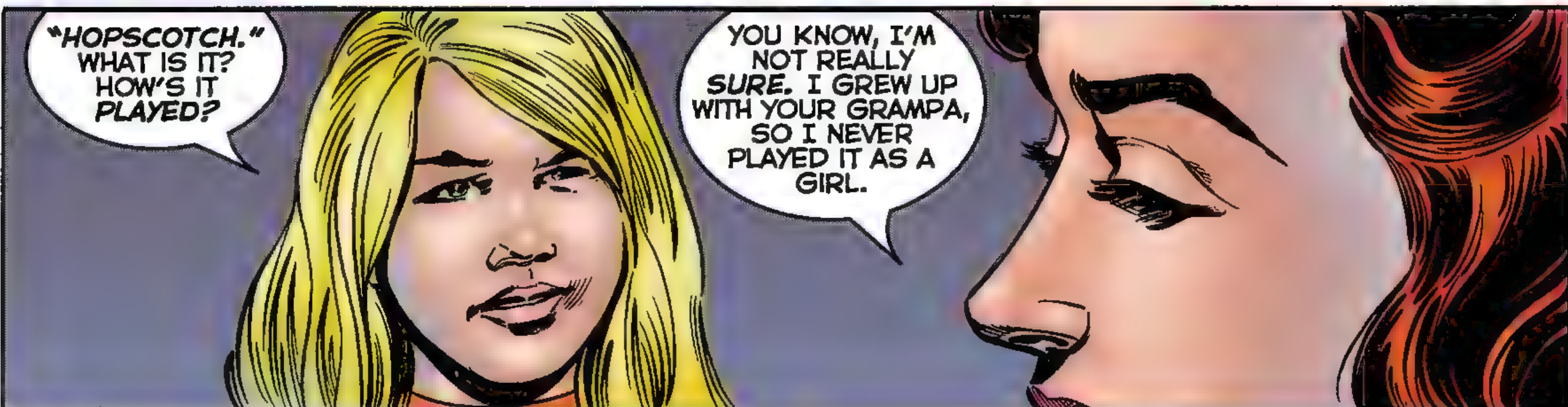
CAN I
ASK YOU A
QUESTION?

YOU
CAN ASK ME
ANYTHING,
HONEY. YOU
KNOW THAT.
WHAT IS
IT?



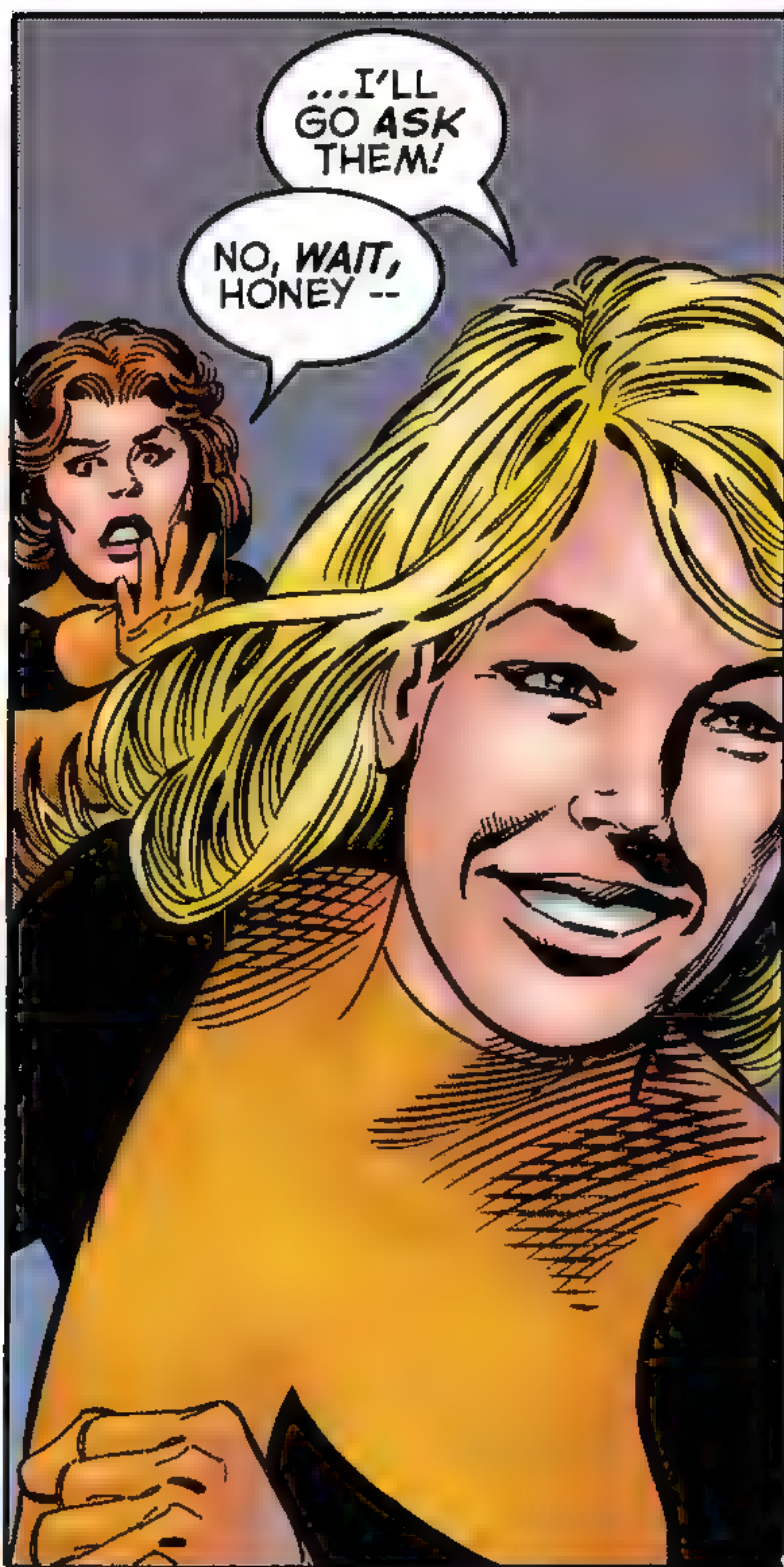
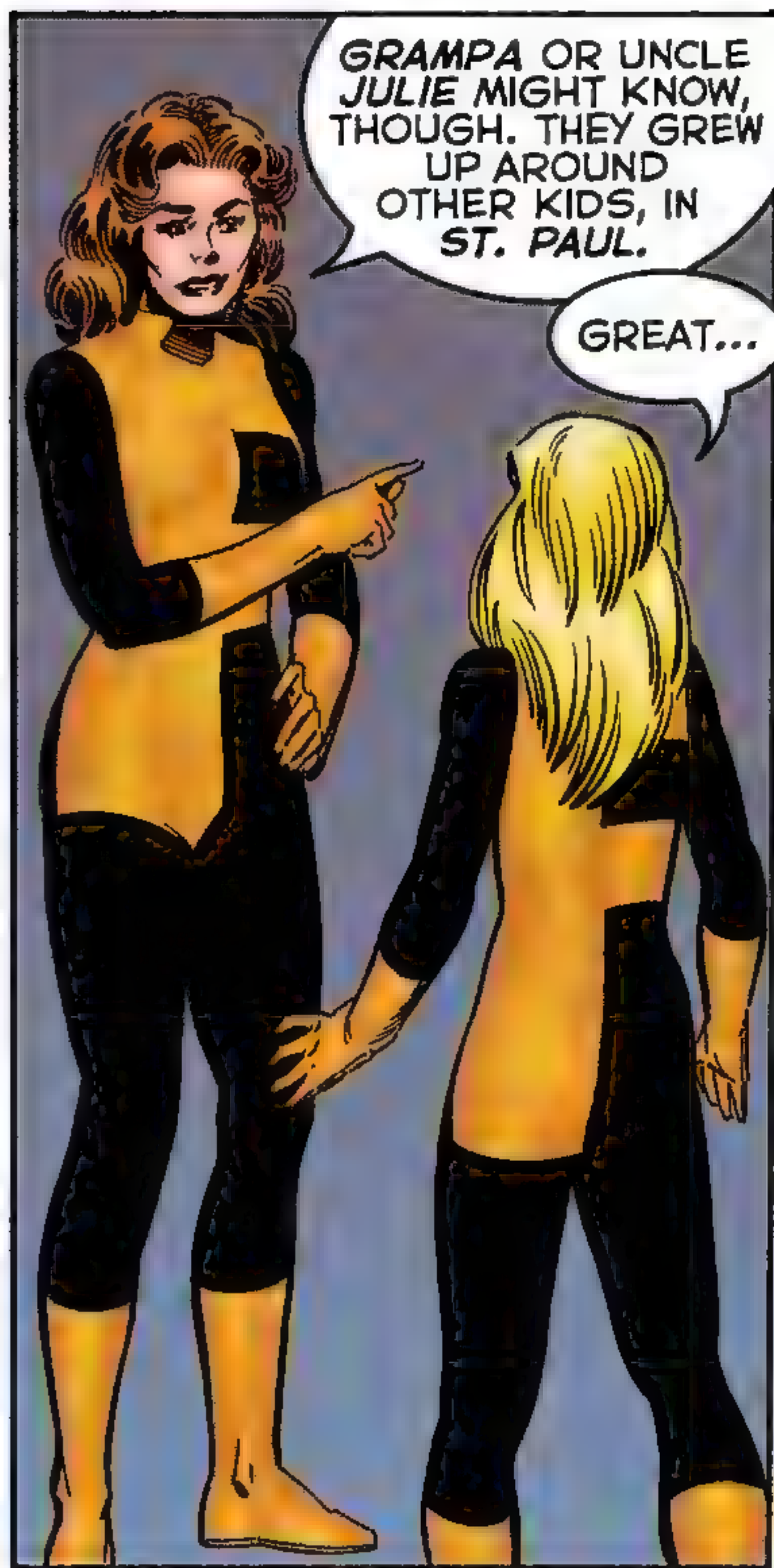
WELL,
IT'S THIS
GAME...

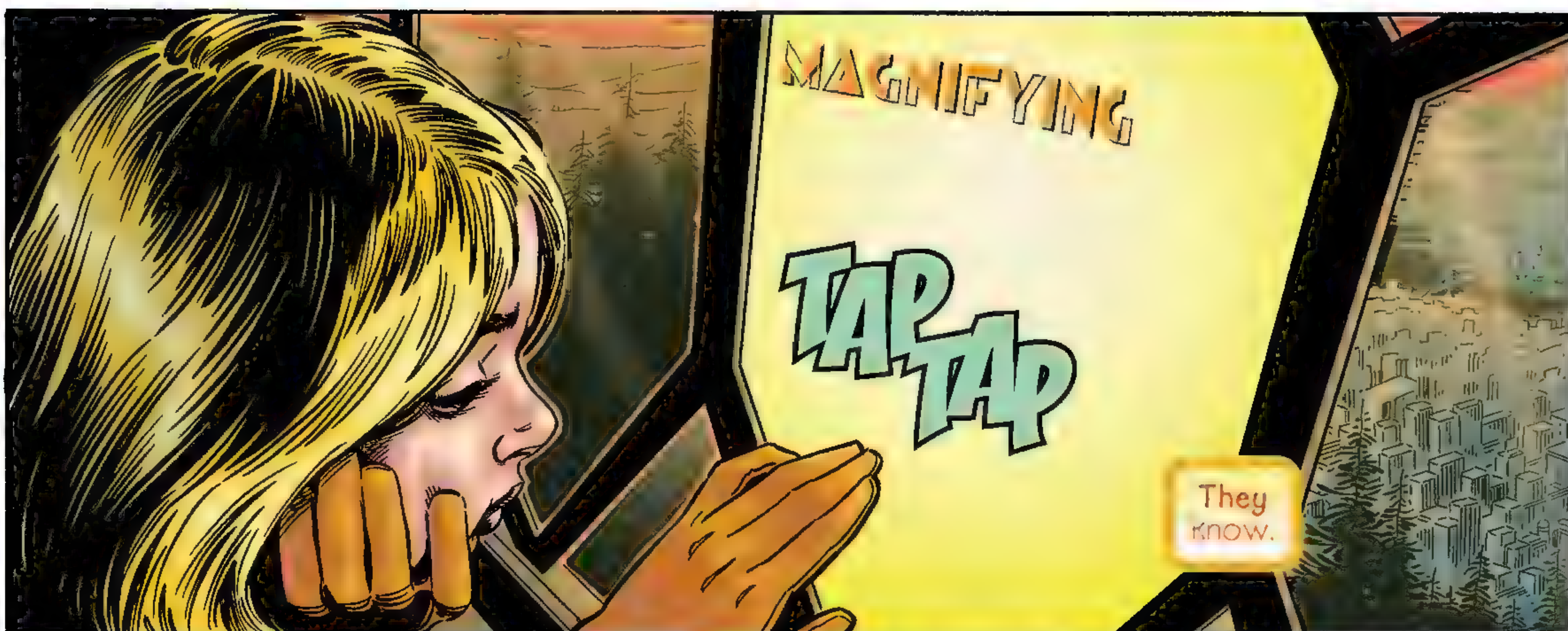
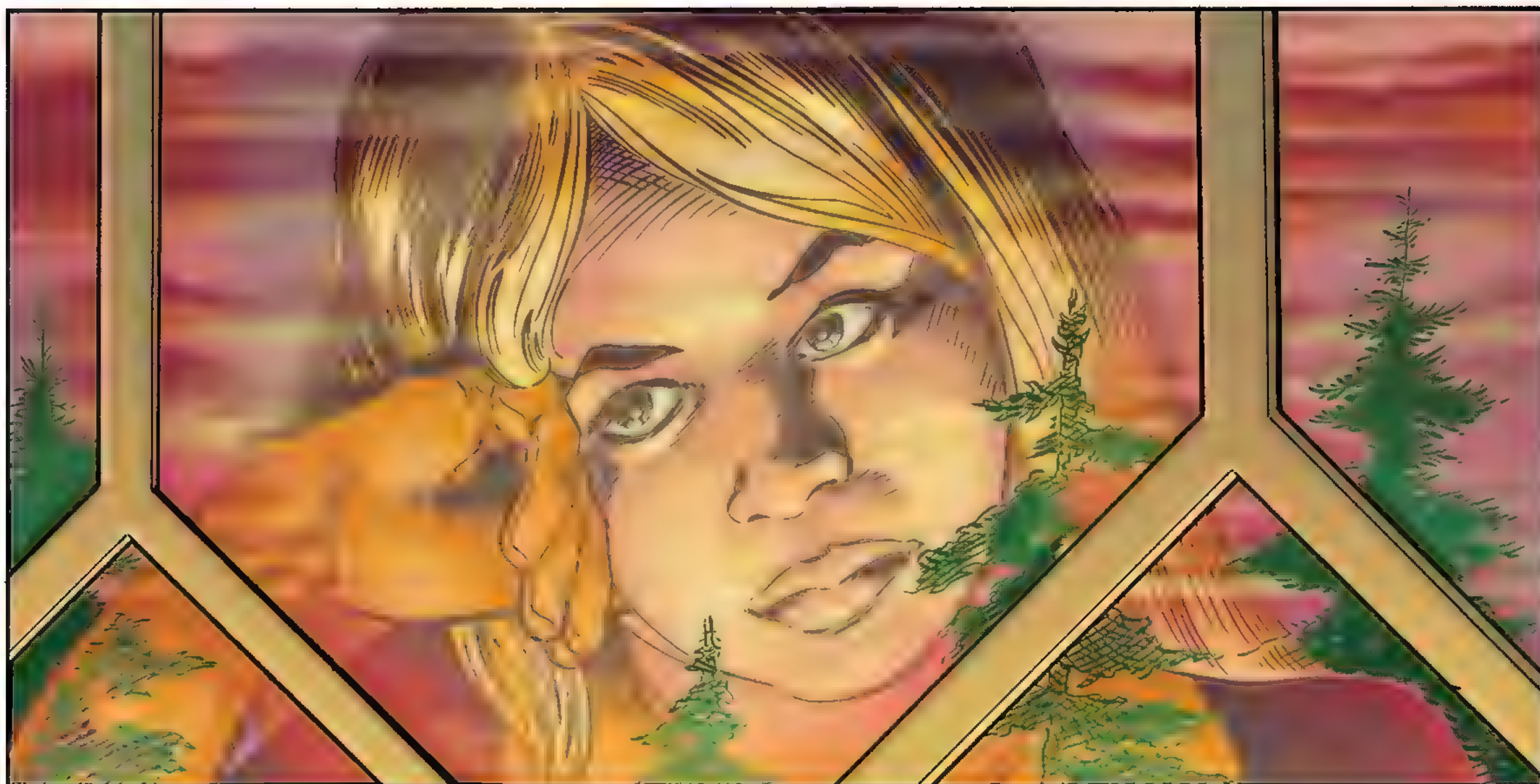
SURE.
THAT'S CALLED
"HOPSCOTCH."

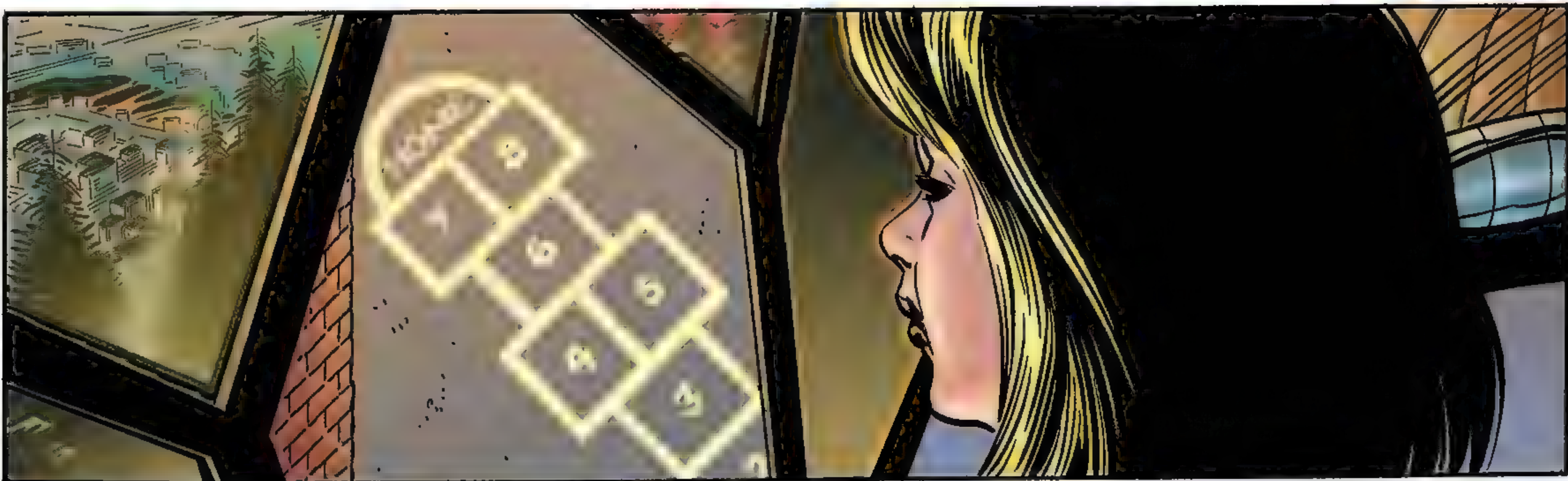
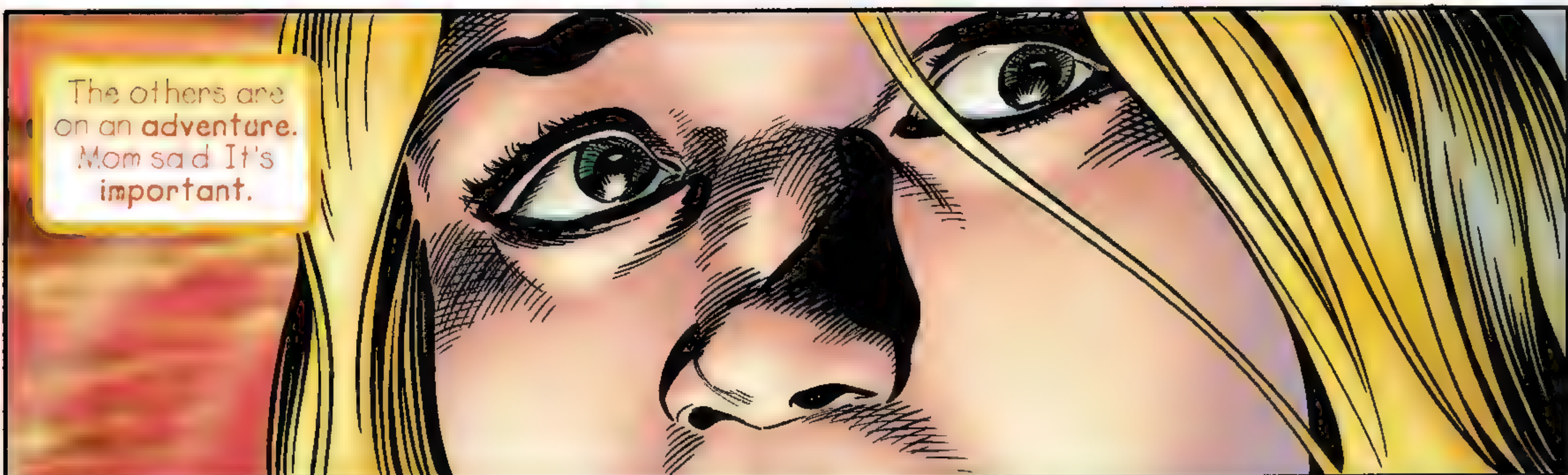
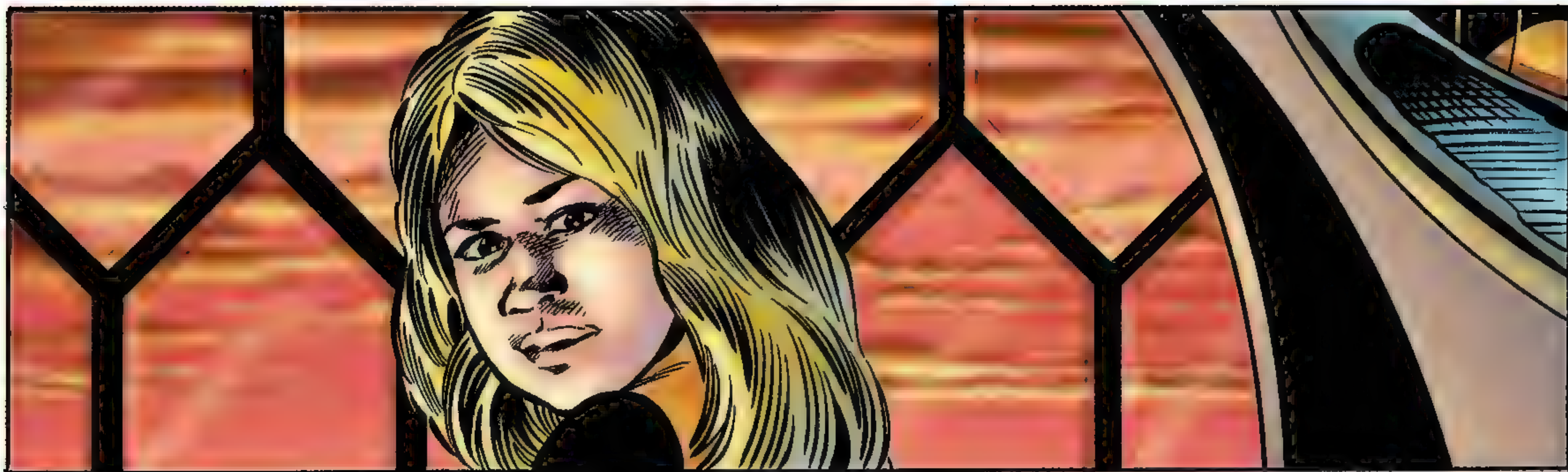


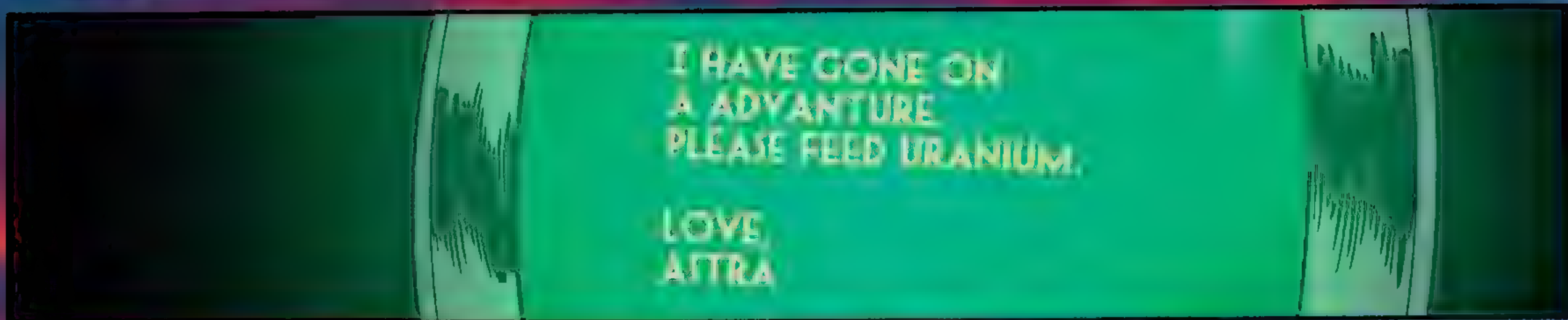
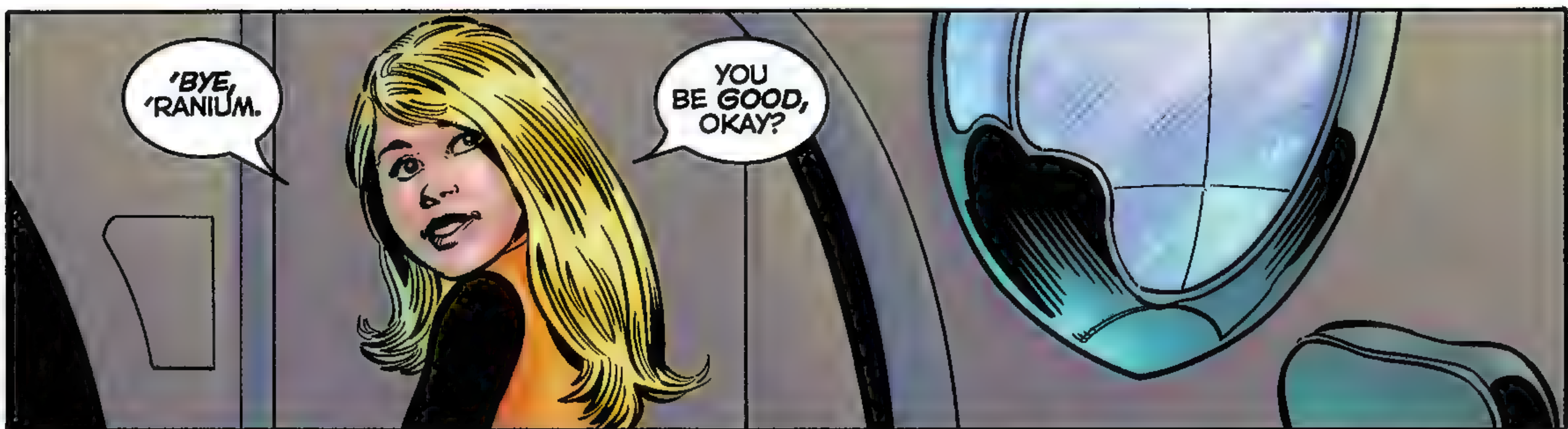
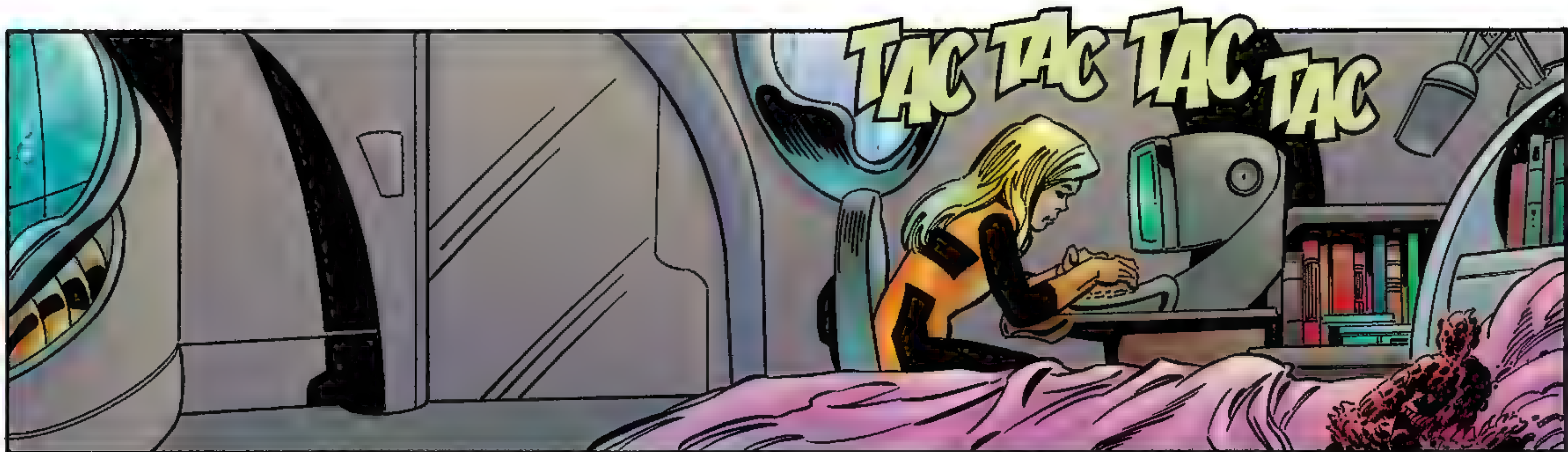
"HOPSCOTCH."
WHAT IS IT?
HOW'S IT
PLAYED?

YOU KNOW, I'M
NOT REALLY
SURE. I GREW UP
WITH YOUR GRAMPA,
SO I NEVER
PLAYED IT AS A
GIRL.













PUSH UP
HERE

PUSH UP
HERE

TO OPEN
THE SELL BY DATE IS IMPRINTED
ON THE TOP OF THE CARTON.

HAVE YOU SEEN ME?



CALL 1-800-634-FOOD

ENTERING
BERMUDA TRIANGLE
AIRSPACE. TARGET
CO-ORDINATES
DEAD AHEAD.

SWITCHING
TO SUBMERSIBLE
MODE.

SPLASH

DON'T
WORRY,
NATALIE.

-- ASTRA
WILL BE THERE.
SHE'LL BE WITH
MY MOTHER, AND
SHE'LL BE ALL
RIGHT.

YOU'LL
SEE.

COMING
UP ON
MONSTRO
CITY
NOW...

WH-
WHAT?!

IT --
IT CAN'T
BE!

REX --
WAIT!

WE'LL
BE IN THE
ATMO-SPHERE
IN MINUTES!
YOU DON'T
NEED TO --

YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND,
DR. FURST. THIS
IS -- WAS --
MY HOME.

AND
NOW --

ADVENTURES IN OTHER WORLDS



LOOK
AT IT!

THIS --
WAS A PROUD
CITY! GRACEFUL,
ELEGANT -- TEEMING WITH
MILLIONS OF INHABITANTS!
IT STOOD FOR
CENTURIES -- A JEWEL
IN THE OCEAN
DEPTHS!

AND
NOW -- AND
NOW --

EASY,
KIDDO.
YOU'RE UPSET,
ON ACCOUNTA
ASTRA MISSIN'.
WE ALL
ARE.

BUT
WE NEED TO
STAY FOCUSED.
DON'T LET THIS
MAKE YOU --





SKREK!

P-PRINCE
REX! HOW
N-NICE TO
SEE --

SILENCE!

NO,
SPEAK. TELL
ME, SKREK -- WHAT
HAPPENED HERE?
WHERE IS MY
MOTHER --



-- WHERE
IS **MADAME
MAJESTRIX**
!?!

SHE...
SHE NEVER
CAME
BACK...



"YOU -- YOU FOUGHT HER, OVER
THE **GEMENSION JEWEL**, AND
SHE WAS TAKEN BY IT --

"-- AND THAT'S THE LAST
ANYONE'S SEEN OF HER!



"THE **TRENCHERS** -- THEY
ATTACKED, LAID **SIEGE** TO
THE CITY, AND DROVE US OUT
INTO THE OCEAN WASTES!

"WELL, DROVE **MOST**
OF US OUT. SOME,
AH, **HARDY SOULS** -- "



AGAIN, SILENCE. I WAS SO SURE
SHE'D RETURNED -- INVEIGLED
ASTRA INTO SOME MAD
SCHEME OF HERS...

BUT IF
SHE DID,
SHE'D RETURN
TO **MONSTRO CITY**.
SHE'D NEVER
ALLOW IT TO
LIE FALLOW
LIKE THIS.

ASTRA'S
NOT WITH HER,
THEN.

THEN
WHERE? SHE
WAS TALKING ABOUT
HOPSCOTCH LAST NIGHT,
FOR PITY'S SAKE!
HOPSCOTCH!



AND THEN -- THAT
NOTE SHE LEFT ON HER
COMPUTER, ABOUT
GOING ON AN
ADVENTURE...

SOME-
ONE'S
TAKEN
HER.

ONE
OF OUR
ENEMIES HAS
MY LITTLE
GIRL --

"-- AND I'M NOT GOING TO REST UNTIL WE GET HER **BACK!**"

I saw it (yesterday), and nobody could tell me what it was. Not Mom -- not even Mr. Smartie. So I came to find out.

I saw it yesterday, and nobody could tell me what it was. Not Mom -- not even Mr. Smartie. So I came to find out.

Panel 1: A woman in a blue dress and cap asks, "WHO'RE YOU?" to a blonde woman in a purple shirt. The blonde woman has a star and crescent on her back. A text box says, "I'm one of the First Family, and that's what we do." A speech bubble from the blonde woman says, "I've never seen you before."

Panel 1: A woman in a blue dress and cap asks, "WHO'RE YOU?" to a blonde woman in a purple shirt. The blonde woman has a star and crescent on her back. A text box says, "I'm one of the First Family, and that's what we do." A speech bubble from the blonde woman says, "I've never seen you before."

Panel 1: A woman in a blue dress and cap asks, "WHO'RE YOU?" to a blonde woman in a purple shirt. The blonde woman has a star and crescent on her back. A text box says, "I'm one of the First Family, and that's what we do." A speech bubble from the blonde woman says, "I've never seen you before."

I'M...
I'M NEW
HERE.

THAT'S
HOPSCOTCH,
RIGHT? CAN
YOU TEACH
ME TO
PLAY?

TEACH YOU? I DON'T TEACH HOPSCOTCH, NEW GIRL -- I WIN IT!

COME BACK WHEN YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY -- AND BE READY TO LOSE!

BUT --

DON'T MIND MARTRICE --

TEACH YOU? I DON'T TEACH HOPSCOTCH, NEW GIRL -- I WIN IT!

COME BACK WHEN YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY -- AND BE READY TO LOSE!

BUT --

DON'T MIND MARTRICE --

TEACH YOU? I DON'T TEACH HOPSCOTCH, NEW GIRL -- I WIN IT!

COME BACK WHEN YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY -- AND BE READY TO LOSE!

BUT --

DON'T MIND MARTRICE --

TEACH YOU? I DON'T TEACH HOPSCOTCH, NEW GIRL -- I WIN IT!

COME BACK WHEN YOU KNOW HOW TO PLAY -- AND BE READY TO LOSE!

BUT --

DON'T MIND MARTRICE --

-- SHE'S LIKE THAT WITH EVERYBODY. SHE THROWS A HISSY FIT IF NO ONE'LL PLAY WITH HER --

-- AN' HER MOM'S PRINCIPAL, SO SHE CAN MAKE TROUBLE.

I'M LEESHA. I'LL TEACH YOU TO PLAY, BUT NOT RIGHT NOW.

-- SHE'S LIKE THAT WITH EVERYBODY. SHE THROWS A HISSY FIT IF NO ONE'LL PLAY WITH HER --

-- AN' HER MOM'S PRINCIPAL, SO SHE CAN MAKE TROUBLE.

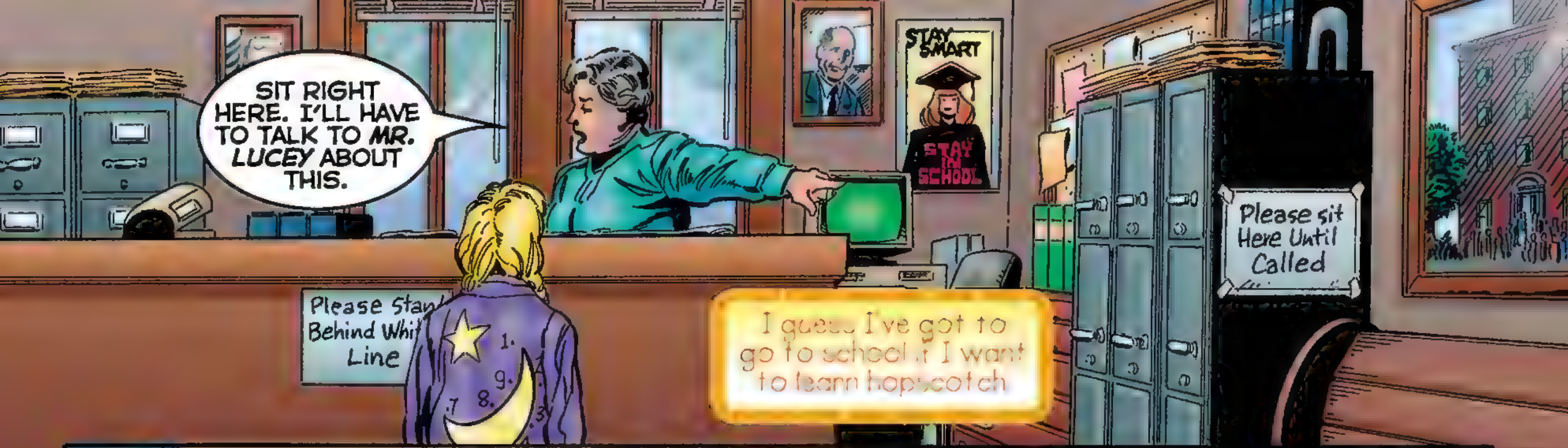
I'M LEESHA. I'LL TEACH YOU TO PLAY, BUT NOT RIGHT NOW.

-- SHE'S LIKE THAT WITH **EVERYBODY**. SHE THROWS A **HISSY FIT** IF NO ONE'LL PLAY WITH HER --

-- AN' HER MOM'S **PRINCIPAL**, SO SHE CAN MAKE **TROUBLE**.

I'M **LEESHA**. I'LL TEACH YOU TO PLAY, BUT NOT RIGHT NOW.

[illegible][illegible]



SIT RIGHT HERE. I'LL HAVE TO TALK TO MR. LUCEY ABOUT THIS.

Please Stand Behind White Line

I guess I've got to go to school if I want to learn hopscotch.



These computers are real old -- like one Grampa gave me when I was four, 'cause he didn't use it any more.

But there are way dumber.



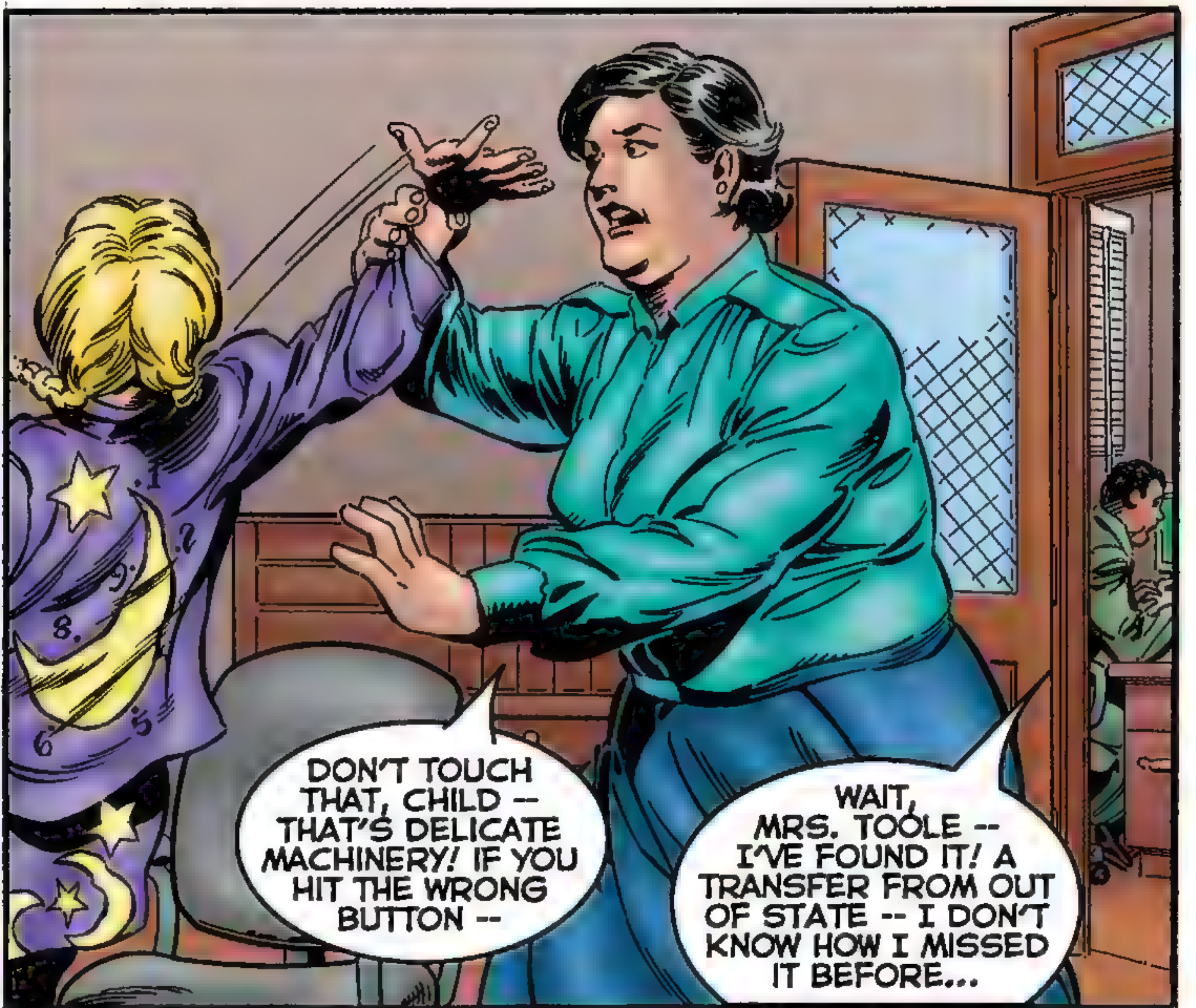
Still, they're easy to use -- easier even than shutting off my uniform's locator chip --

TAKATAKATAKATAK



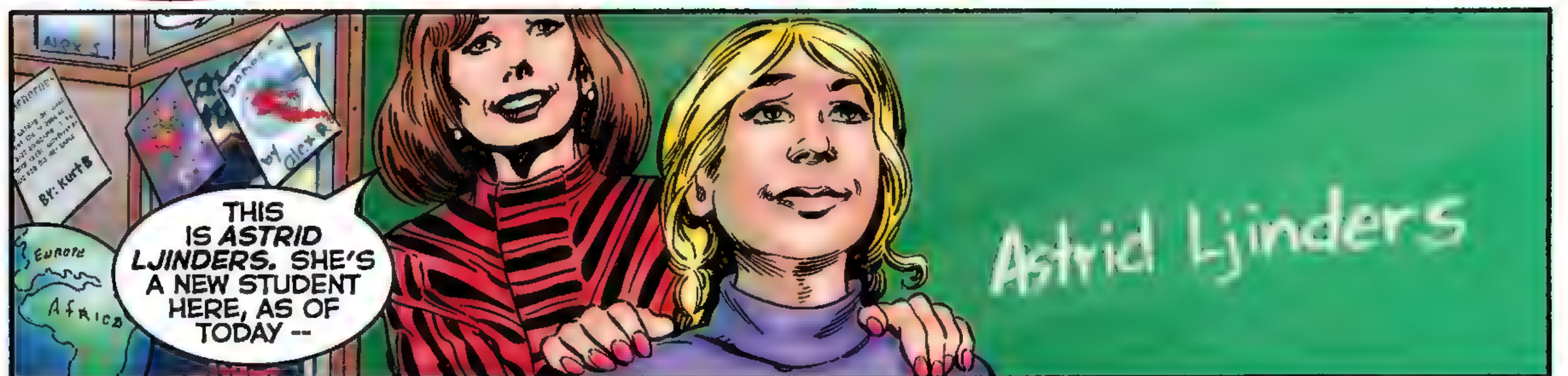
I'M AFRAID WE DON'T HAVE ANY RECORD OF --

-- WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!



DON'T TOUCH THAT, CHILD -- THAT'S DELICATE MACHINERY! IF YOU HIT THE WRONG BUTTON --

WAIT, MRS. TOOLE -- I'VE FOUND IT! A TRANSFER FROM OUT OF STATE -- I DON'T KNOW HOW I MISSED IT BEFORE...



THIS IS ASTRID LJINDERS. SHE'S A NEW STUDENT HERE, AS OF TODAY --

Astrid Ljinders



"-- AND I'M SURE YOU'LL ALL WANT TO MAKE HER FEEL WELCOME."

WHAT DO YOU **MEAN**, MY GRANDDAUGHTER IS **MISSING**?!

NOW LOOK **HERE**, KASPIAN --



NO, AUGUSTUS FURST. YOU LOOK.

YOU TOOK MY **CHILDREN** FROM ME, AND RAISED THEM AS YOUR OWN. THAT MAY HAVE BEEN A **GOOD THING**, ALL IN ALL --

-- FOR SURELY, THEY WOULD HAVE HAD A **HARD LIFE** WITH THE **BEAST-PEOPLES**.



BUT THEY ARE STILL **BLOOD** OF MY **BLOOD**, AND TO HAVE THEM TURNED AGAINST ME, AS SO OFTEN YOU HAVE DONE --

-- IS MUCH INDEED TO **ENDURE**.

BUT NOW YOU TELL ME THAT ON TOP OF THIS, YOU'RE UNABLE TO SAFEGUARD A SINGLE **TEN-YEAR-OLD GIRL**?



HEY! ENOUGH WITH THE **MOUTH**, ALREADY!

YOU TALK **LOUDLY**, KASPIAN -- BUT WHAT ASSURANCES DO WE HAVE THAT YOU HAVEN'T TAKEN MY DAUGHTER?

REX, NO --



YOU... DARE?



YOU DARE
ACCUSE **KASPIAN**
OF THE BEAST-
MEN?!



I AM A MAN OF
HONOR, CREATURE!
BAD ENOUGH YOU
SULLY MY **DAUGHTER**
WITH YOUR TOUCH,
BUT TO --



-- NO.
ENOUGH.

I WILL
SEND A MESSAGE
THROUGH ALL THE
TRIBES OF THE BEAST-
MEN. ALL THE WILD
WORLD WILL SEARCH
FOR HER --

-- AND IF
SHE CAN BE
FOUND BY US,
SHE WILL
BE.



-- TAKE
HIS HEAD
OFF --

CALM DOWN,
REX -- THIS
MINUTE!

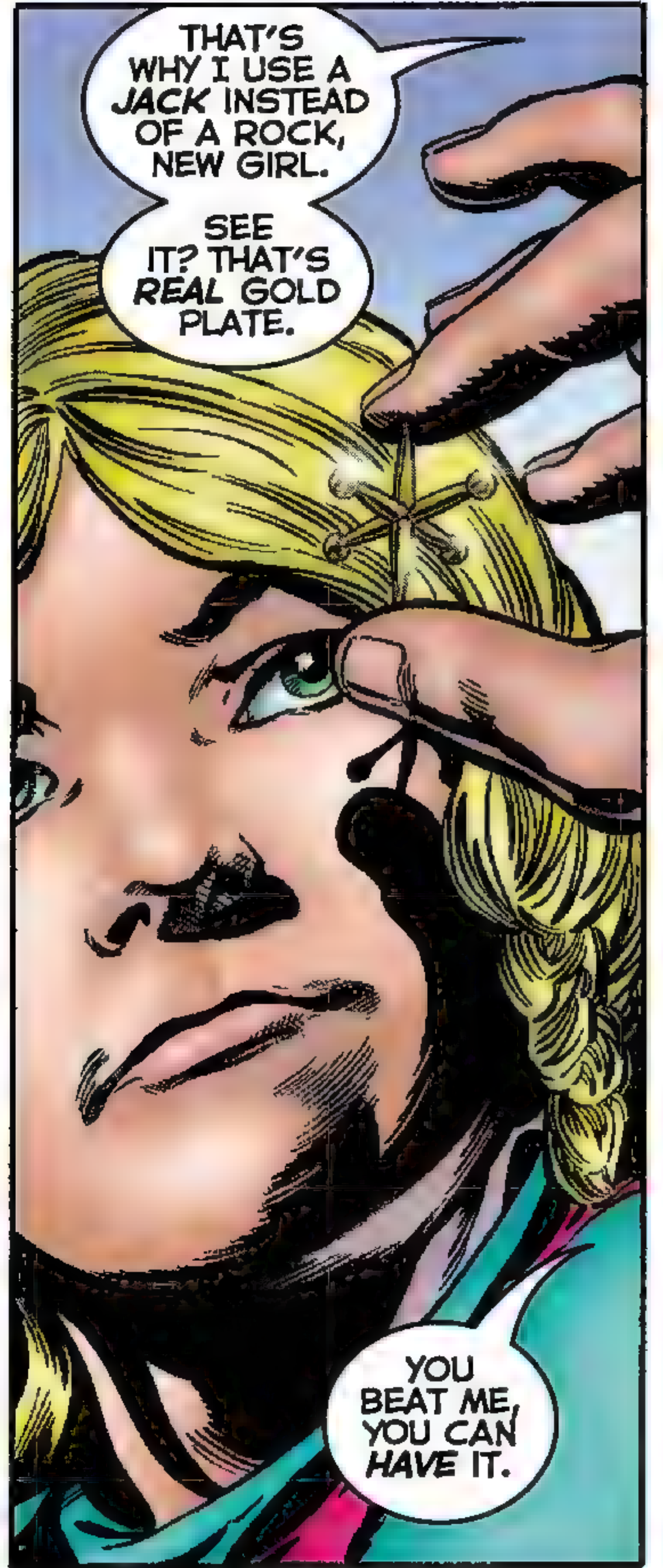
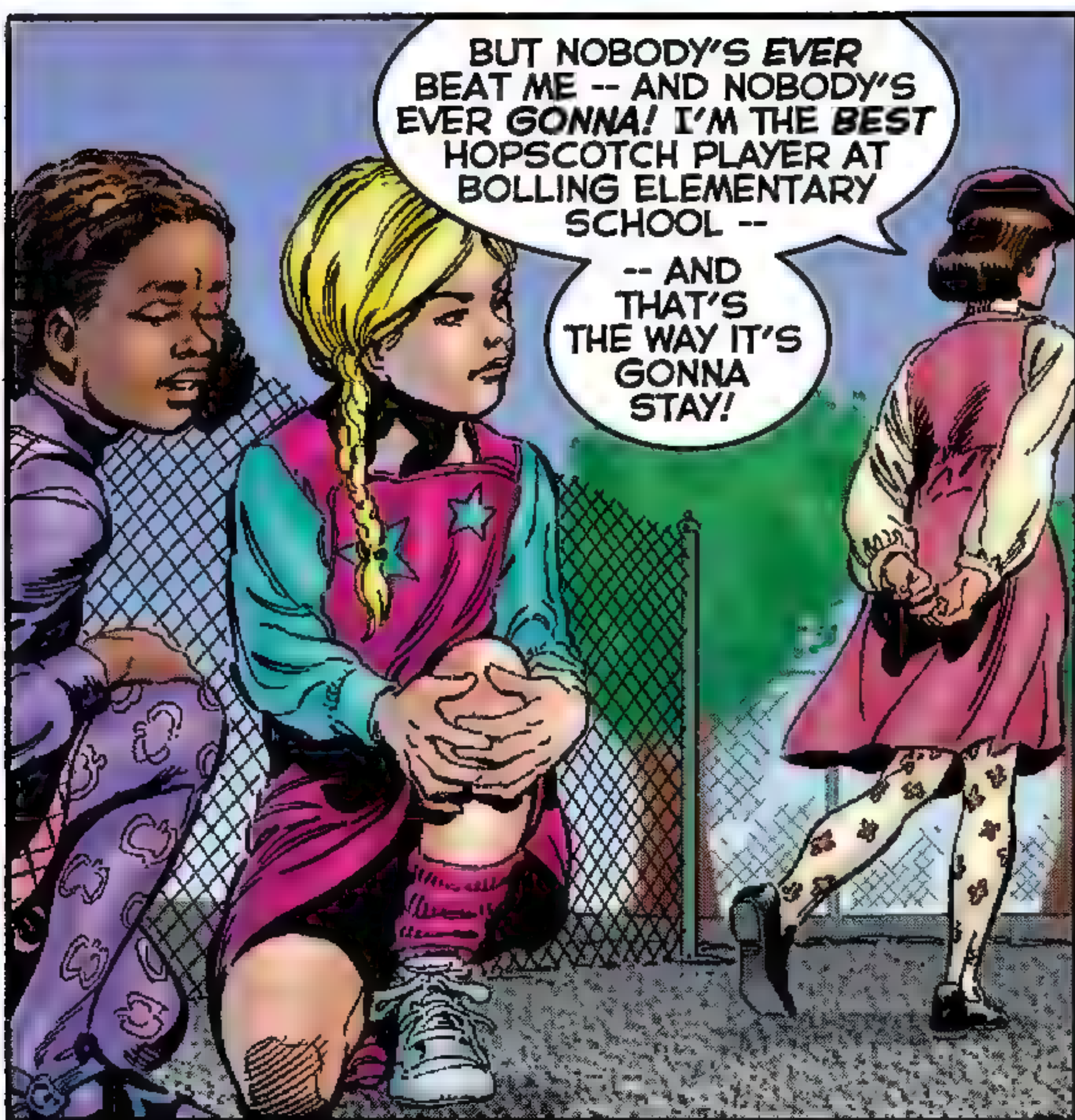
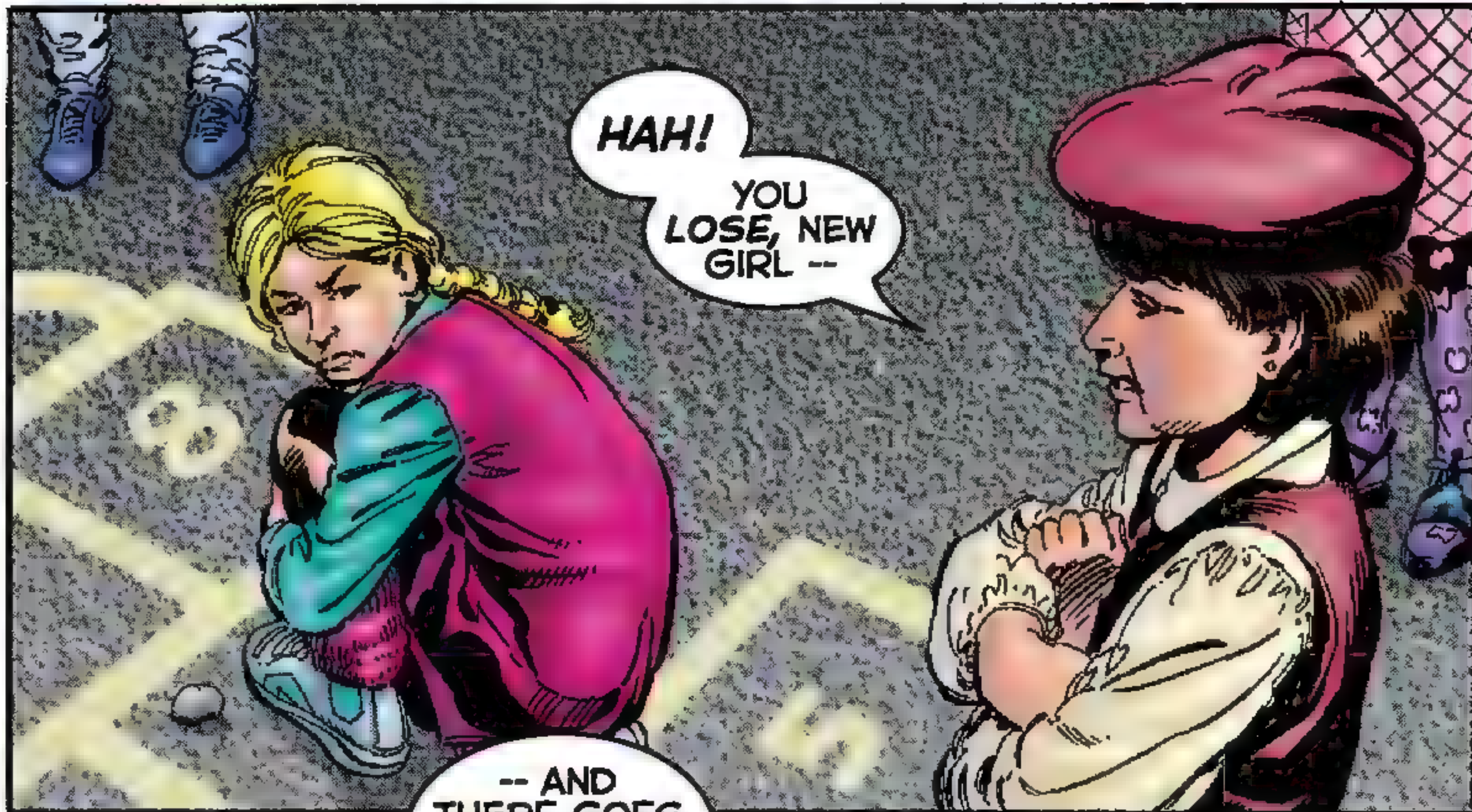
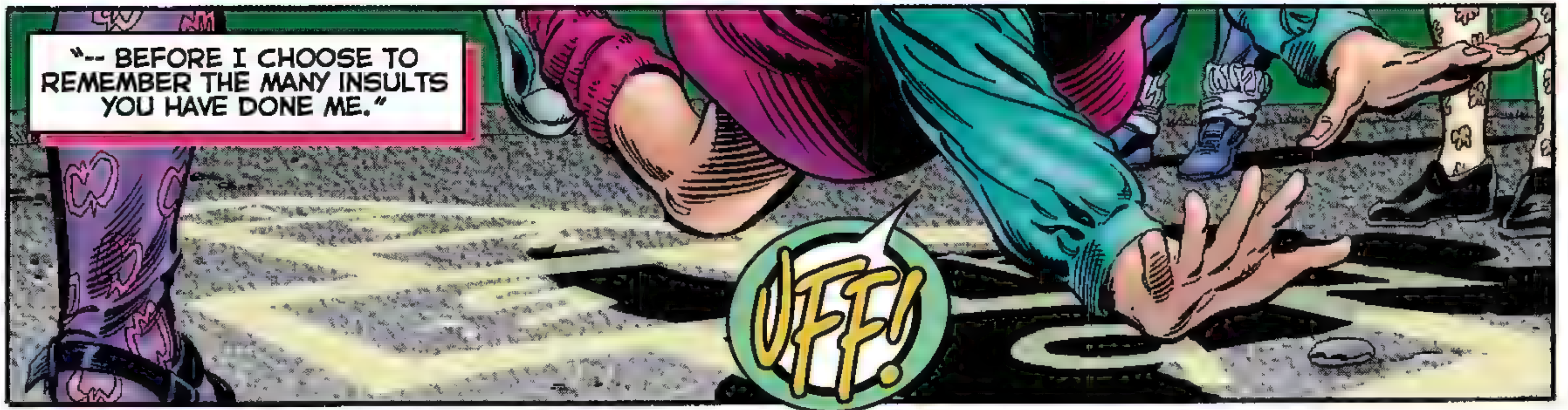
THANK
YOU, **KASPIAN**.
YOU DO US GREAT
SERVICE, AND WE
ARE INDEBTED
TO YOU.



DO NOT MISTAKE ME,
AUGUSTUS FURST. I DO
NOT ACT IN **FRIENDSHIP**.
I SEEK TO PROTECT
BLOOD OF MY
BLOOD --

-- AND NO
MORE.

NOW
GO --





**THE
FIRST
FAMILY!**

YOU
CAN'T HAVE
FOUND ME -- NOT
YET! NOT BEFORE
I'VE REBUILT
OMNIAC!

I'VE GOT
A QUESTION
FOR YOU,
PRAETOR!

WHERE --



If I was home I'd have my room.
And Mr. Smartie and Mom and
Uncle Julie and everyone.

But Grampa says you
have to endure hardship
sometimes, when you're
on an adventure.

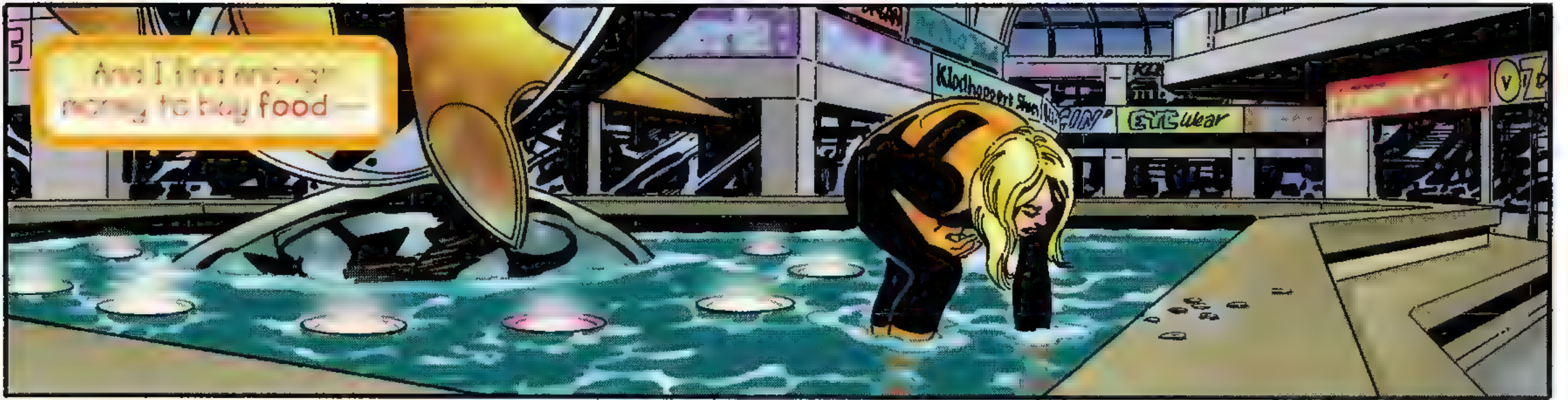


And adventures aren't always
about finding out stuff, he says.
They're about helping people, too.

And these
kids could use
some help



And I'm okay. My power
and my programmable
uniform keep me warm --



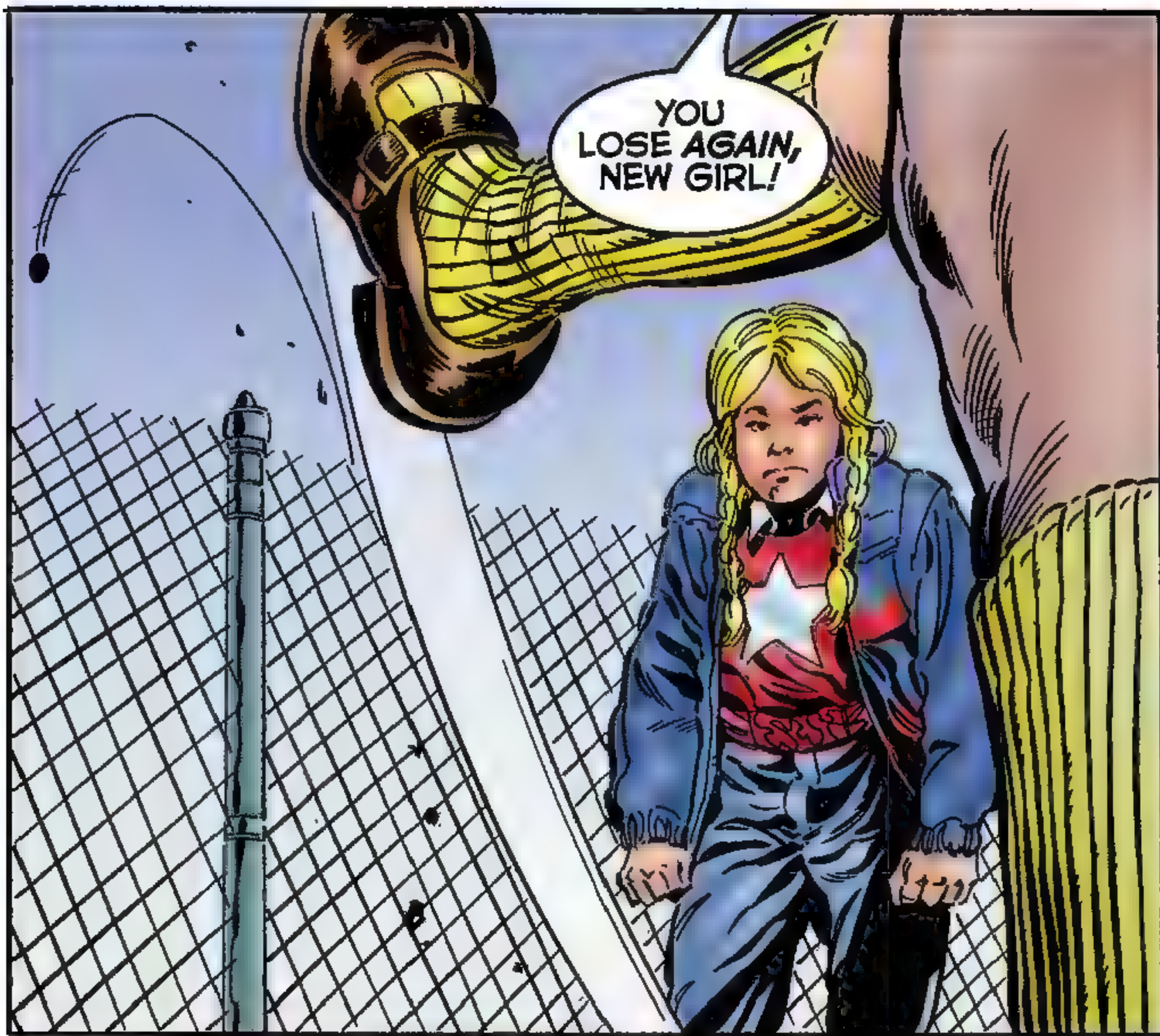
And I find enough
money to buy food --



And I
practice.



Grampa says practice
is real important.



YOU
LOSE AGAIN,
NEW GIRL!



READY
TO GIVE UP
YET?

NO.
COME ON,
LEESHA.



YOU KNOW, YOU
LOOK LIKE THAT
ASTRA, IN THE
FIRST FAMILY.

I DO
NOT! YOU
LOOK LIKE A
ROTIFER!

HUH?

I'M NOT
HER!



I KNOW THAT, SILLY! YOU
JUST LOOK LIKE HER...
SORTA. YOU KNOW, LIKE
ON "SHE'S TWINS,"
ON TV?

UH --
MY MOM
DOESN'T LET
ME WATCH
TV...



YOU'VE NEVER SEEN "SHE'S
TWINS"? OH, YOU GOTTA!
YOU WANT TO COME OVER
TONIGHT? YOU CAN WATCH
IT AT OUR PLACE.

REALLY?!

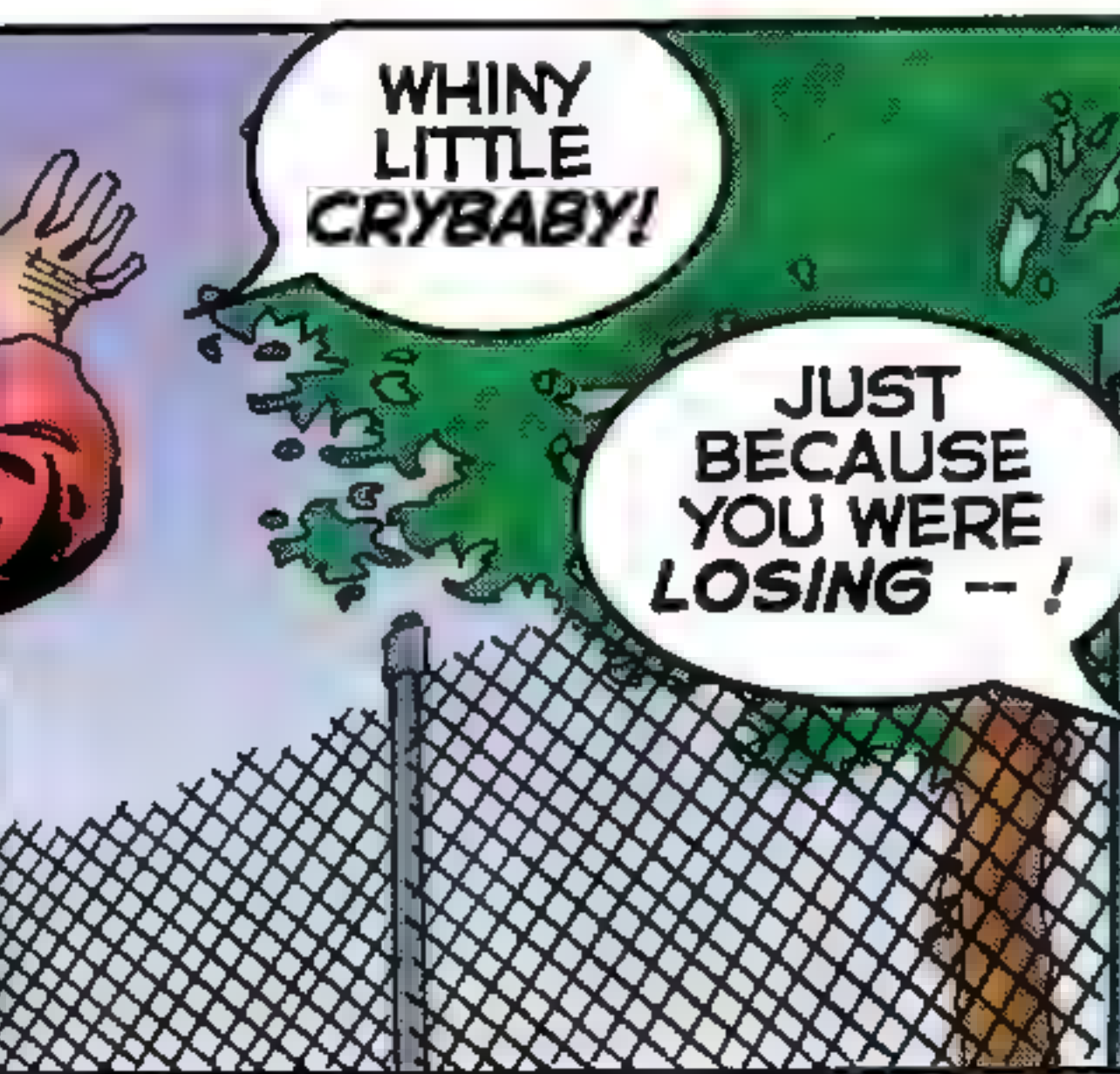
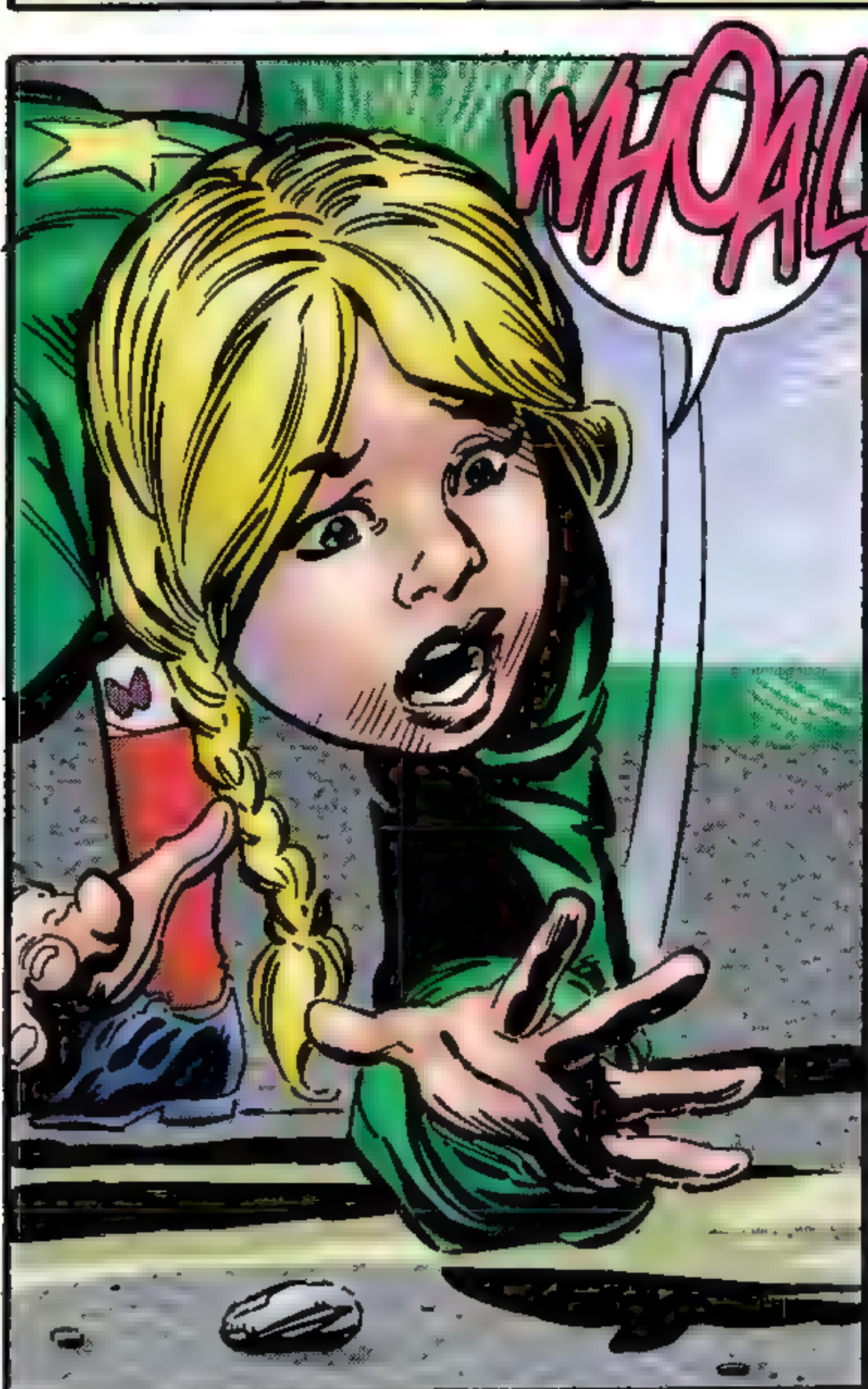
SURE.
UM, WHAT'S A
ROTIFER?

IT'S A
MICROSCOPIC
ORGANISM. NEVER
MIND -- YOU DON'T
REALLY LOOK
LIKE ONE.

WE CAN
WATCH TV
TONIGHT,
HUH?









YOU
WON'T
DEFEAT
ME,
HUMANS!

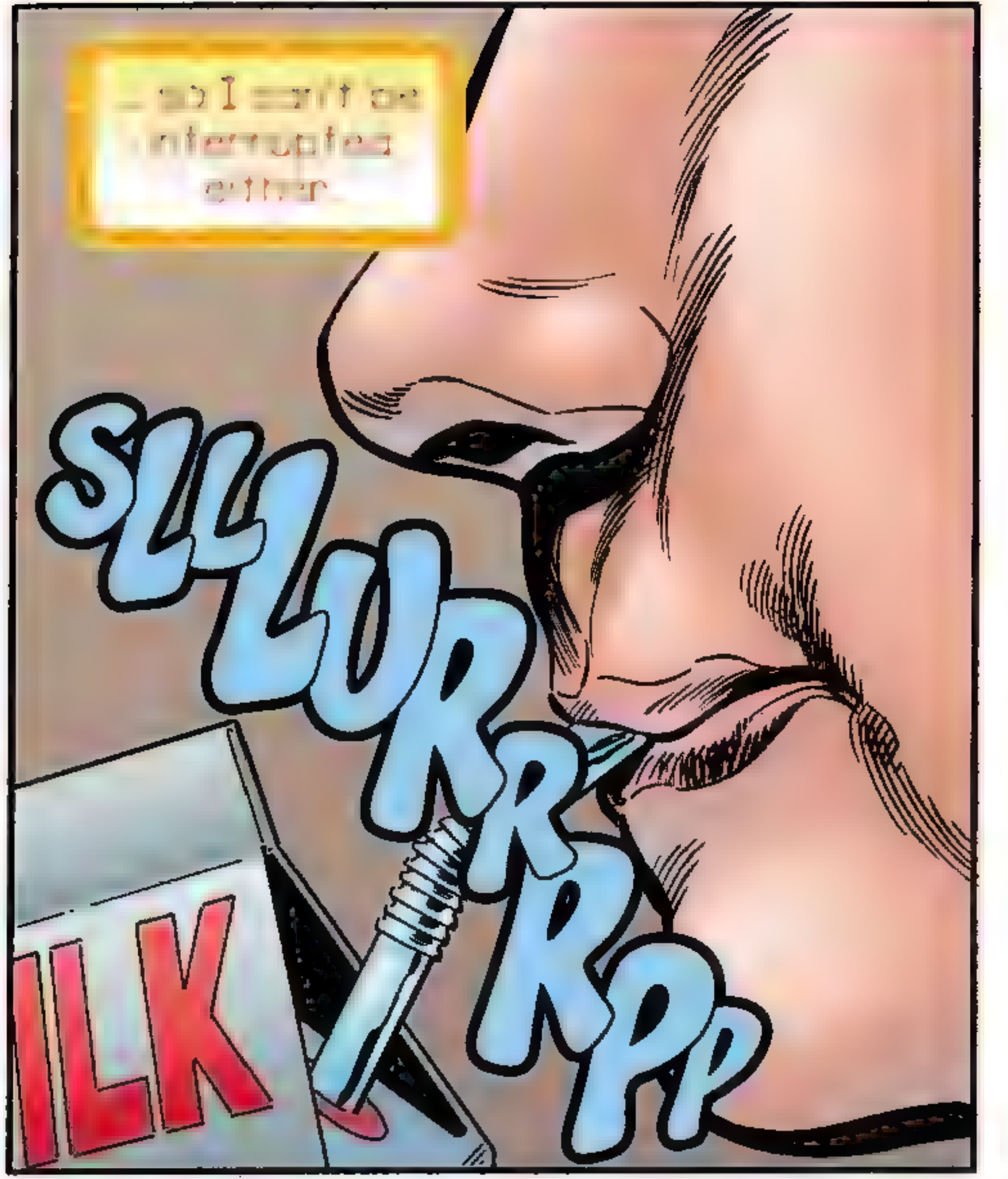
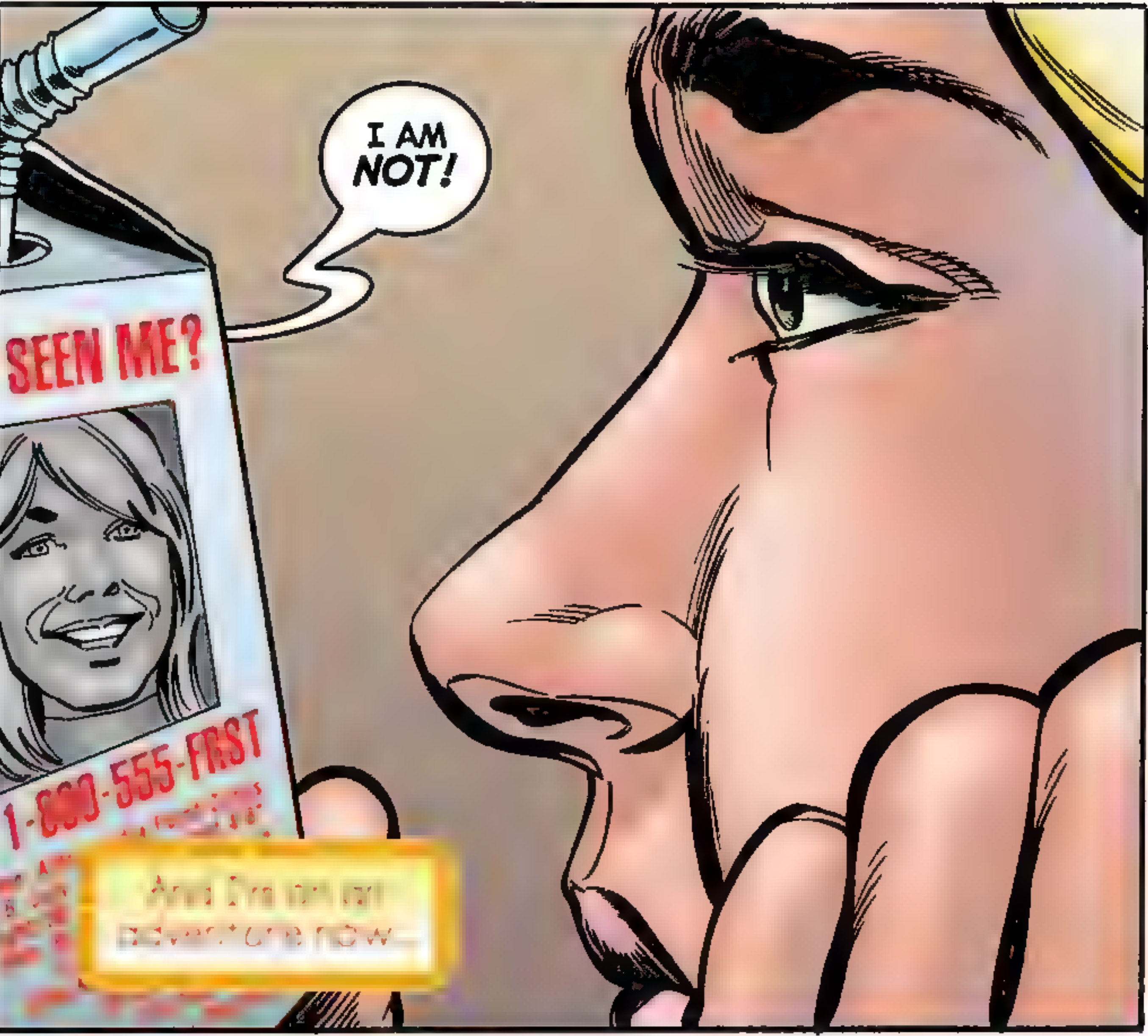
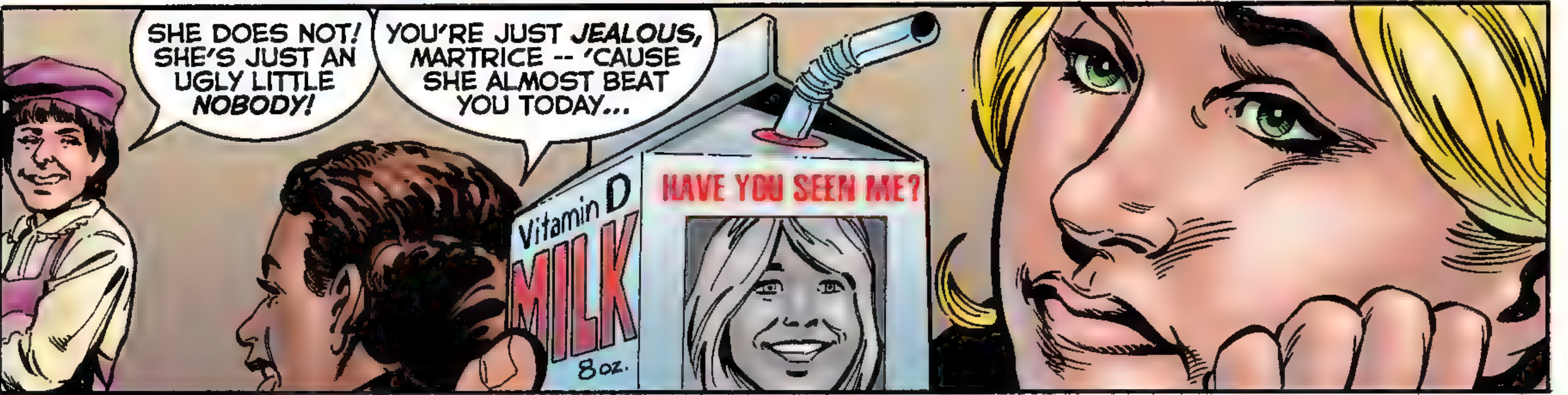
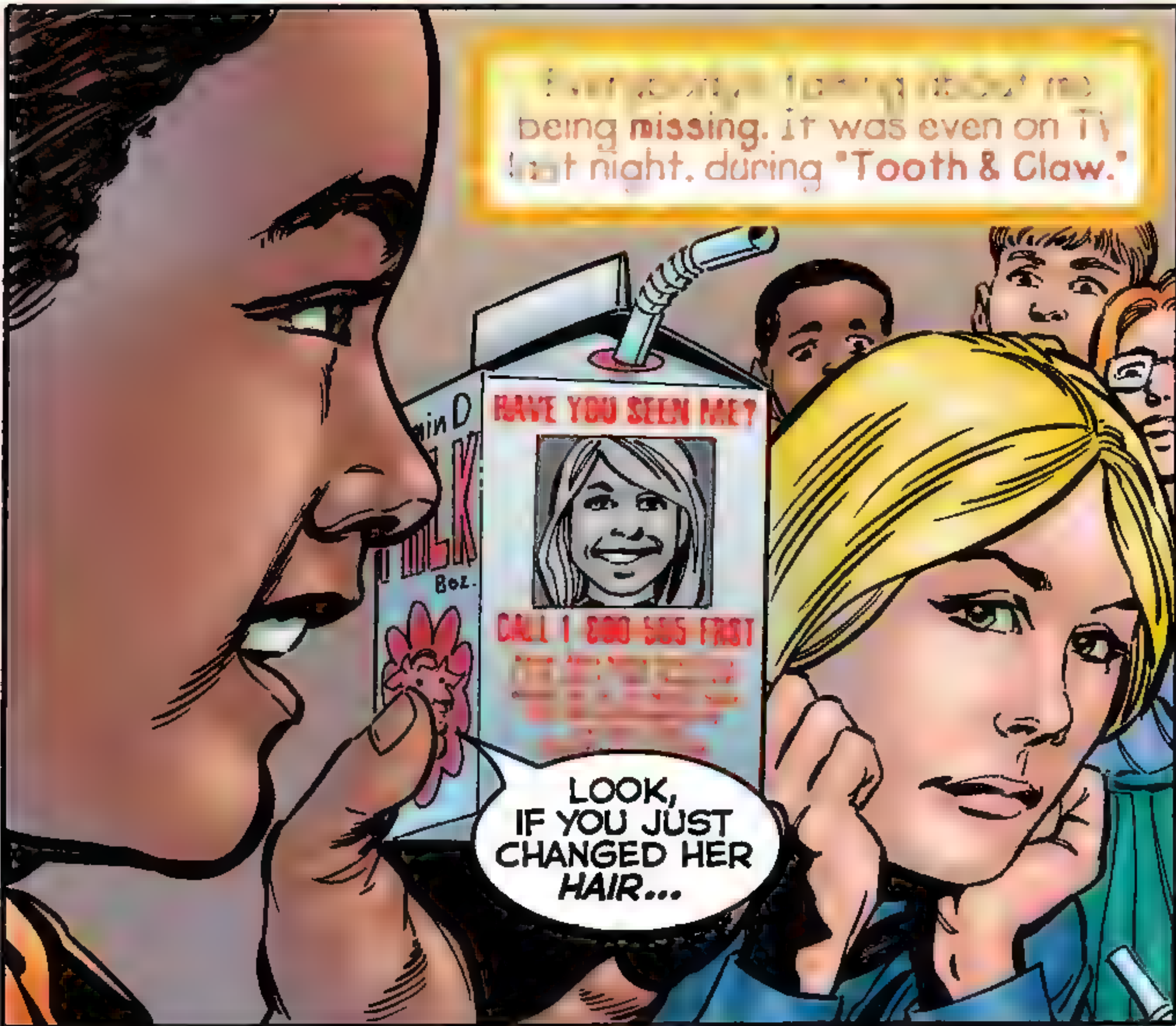
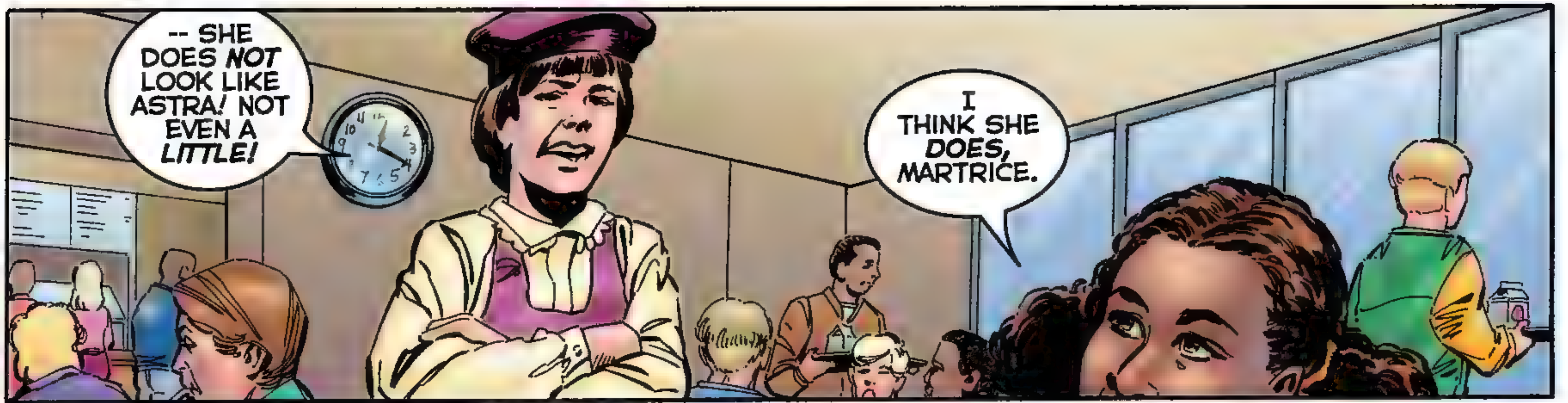
NO ONE
DEFEATS
KRATORR THE
INVINCIBLE!

OH,
I DON'T KNOW
ABOUT THAT,
KRATORR --

-- SEEMS
TO ME I'VE
BEATEN YOU
NINE OR TEN
TIMES, ALL TOLD,
STARTING BACK
IN '54!



-- MY
DAUGHTER?!



IT CAN'T
BE *INSECTRA* --
SHE'S STILL IN
CUSTODY.

UGLY MAX
IS STILL
CATATONIC.

WE DON'T
EVEN KNOW IF
THE *DERELIKT* IS
EVEN IN THIS SPACE-
SECTOR, MUCH
LESS ON
EARTH...

SO MANY
ENEMIES --
AND IT COULD
BE ANY OF
THEM --

OR EVEN SOMEONE
WE'VE NEVER FOUGHT,
STRIKING AT US JUST
BECAUSE OF WHO
WE ARE!

-- WHERE
IS SHE,
DAD --

"-- WHERE'S MY
LITTLE GIRL?!"



DONE!

NOT
BAD, NEW
GIRL --



-- NOW STEP BACK.
IT'S MY TURN
AGAIN.



TAK TAK

She starts off like she's
not even looking. Like
she doesn't need to.

She knows where the
jack is. She knows
where the squares are.



But there's a
puddle from the
rain last night --

AH!



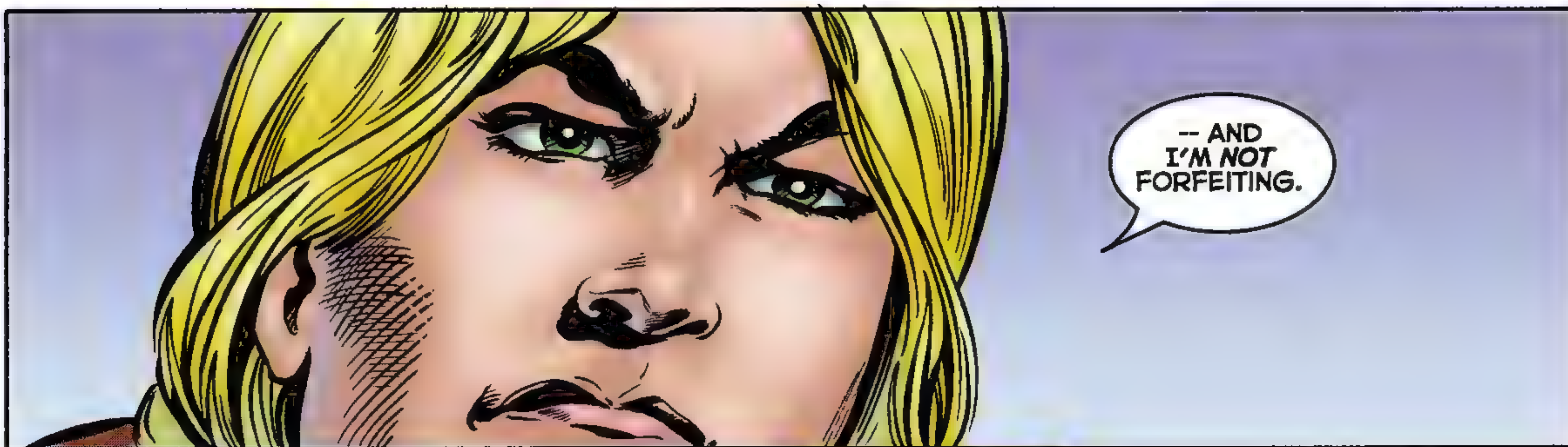
OFF!



OH, GEE.
THERE'S THE BELL,
NEW GIRL. TIME FOR
SCHOOL. BUT WE'RE
TIED -- AND IF YOU
QUIT NOW, YOU
FORFEIT --

-- AND
I WIN!

MY
NAME'S
NOT "NEW
GIRL" --



-- AND
I'M NOT
FORFEITING.



I get my people in the
six, where I'm supposed
to. And I start.

And I can
feel it -- I
know I can
do it --



MY JACK'S STILL
ON THE COURT --
I'LL JUST --

LEAVE
IT *THERE*,
MARTRICE.
YOU WOULDN'T
WANT TO
ACCIDENTALLY
TRIP
ASTRID --

-- OR
*SOME-
THING* --



And then it's
like I'm in *slow
motion* --

-- and every square
is just as big and as
clean as the tiles in
the practice room
back home --



-- and --

I
DID
IT!
I --

-- I
WON!



CHILDREN,
CHILDREN!
THAT WAS THE
BELL! DIDN'T
YOU --

-- OH.

ASTRID --

YOU'RE --

-- YOU'RE --



I'M THE
BEST HOPSCOTCH
PLAYER AT BOLLING
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL,
THAT'S WHO I
AM!

Everything happens
kinda fast after that.

Someone
calls home --

-- and they
come get me.

And Mom's mad,
like I thought --

-- but she
cries, too.

And
later --



THERE
YOU ARE,
ASTRA!

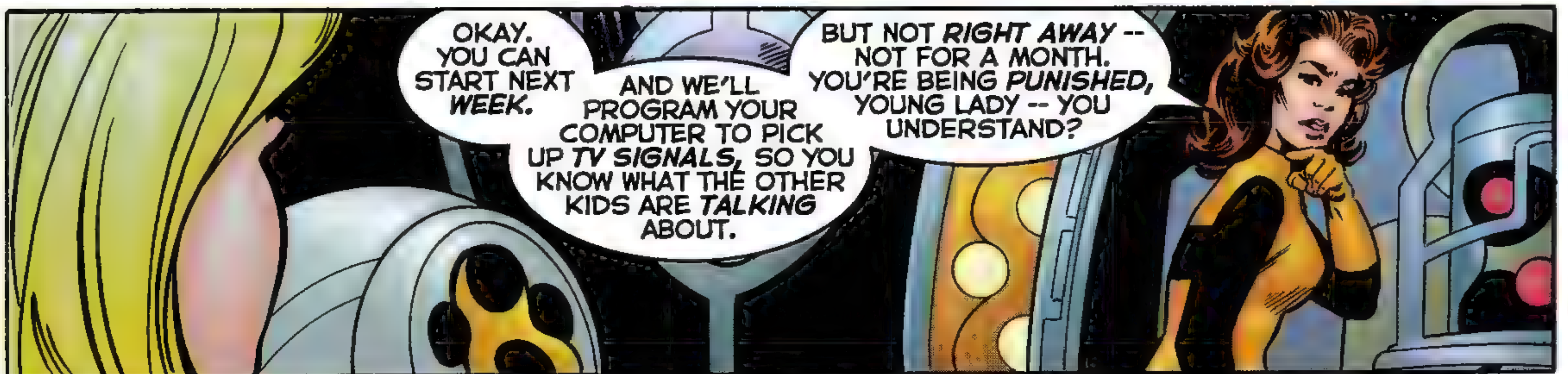
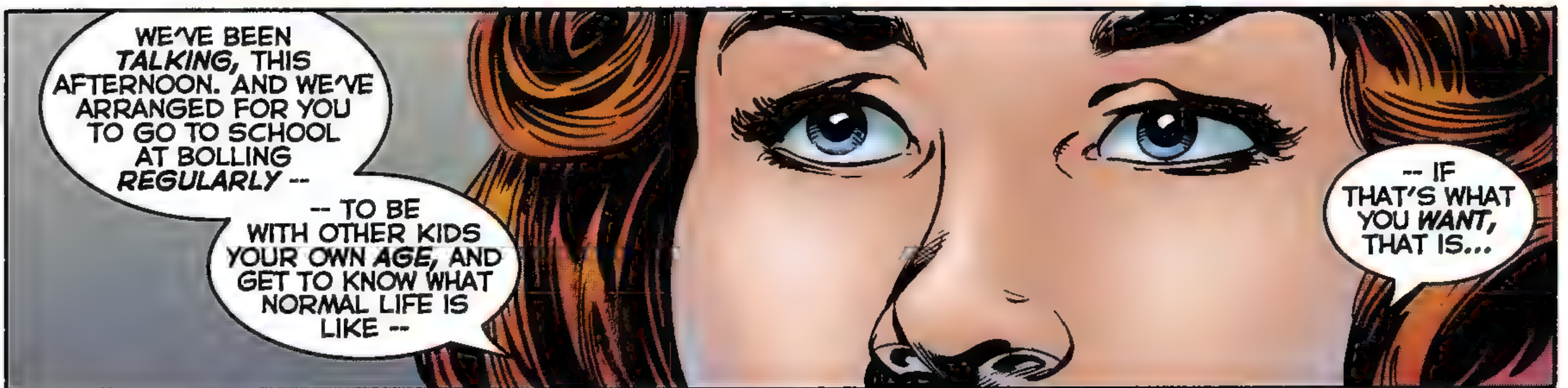
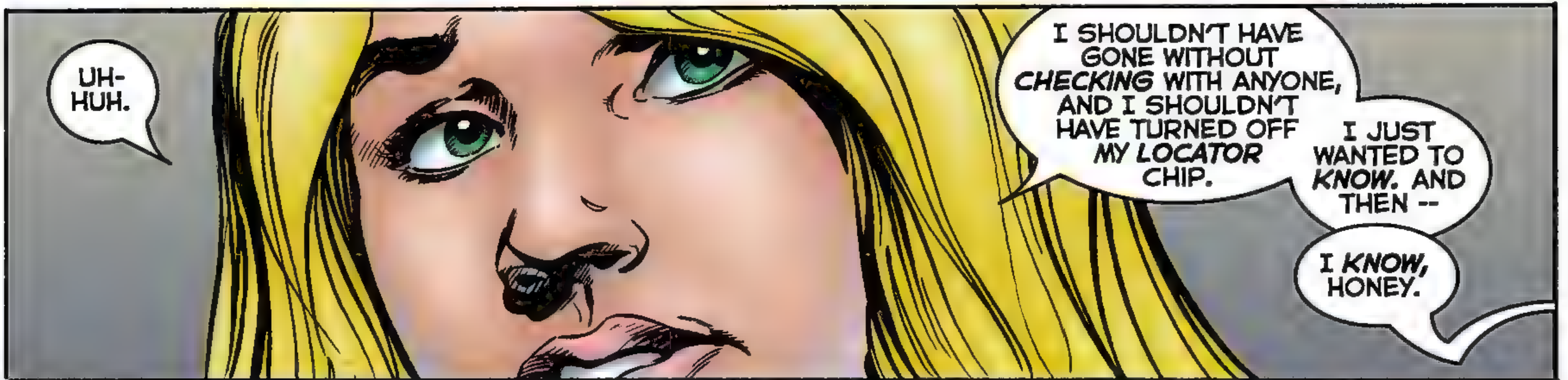
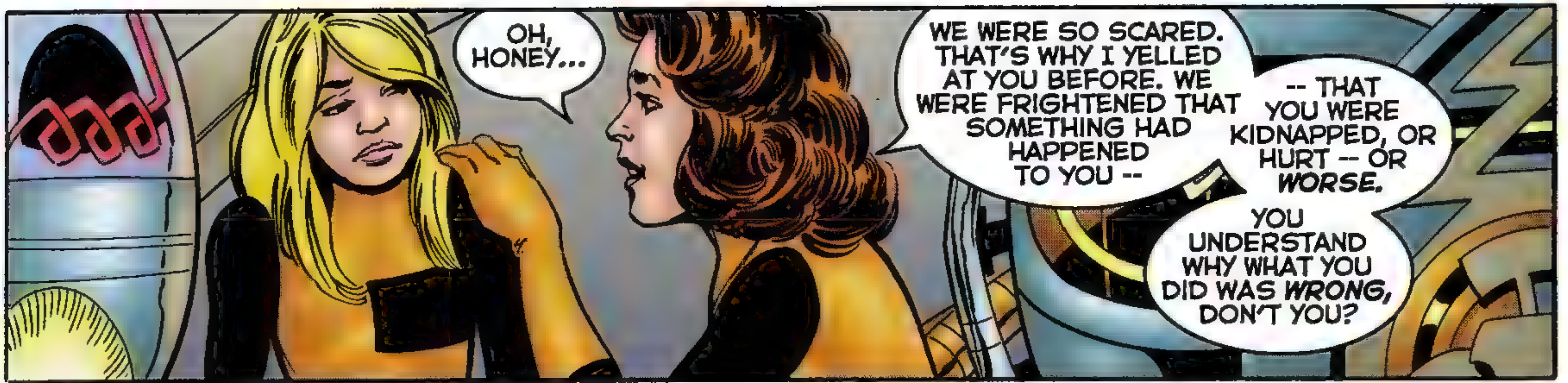
HI,
MOM.

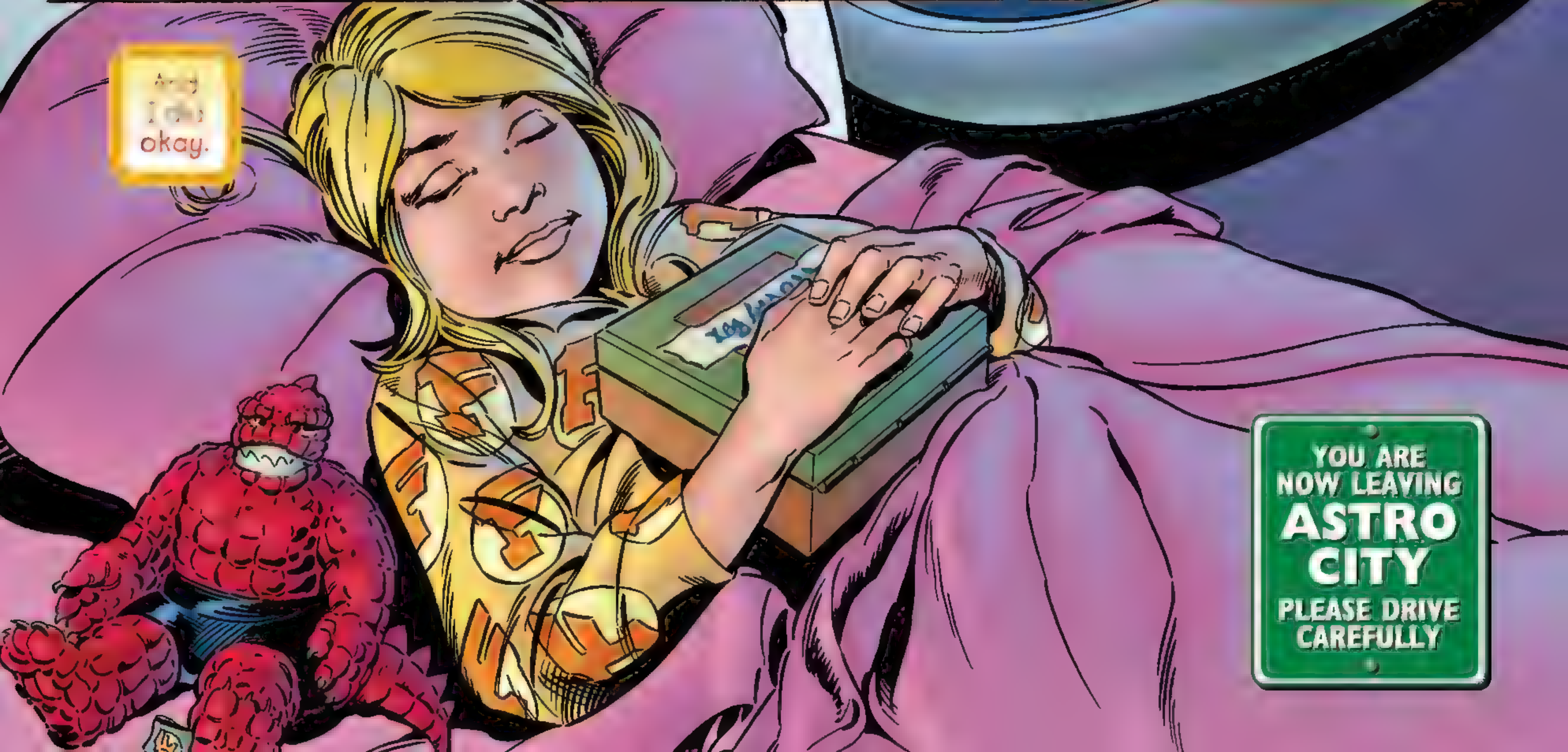
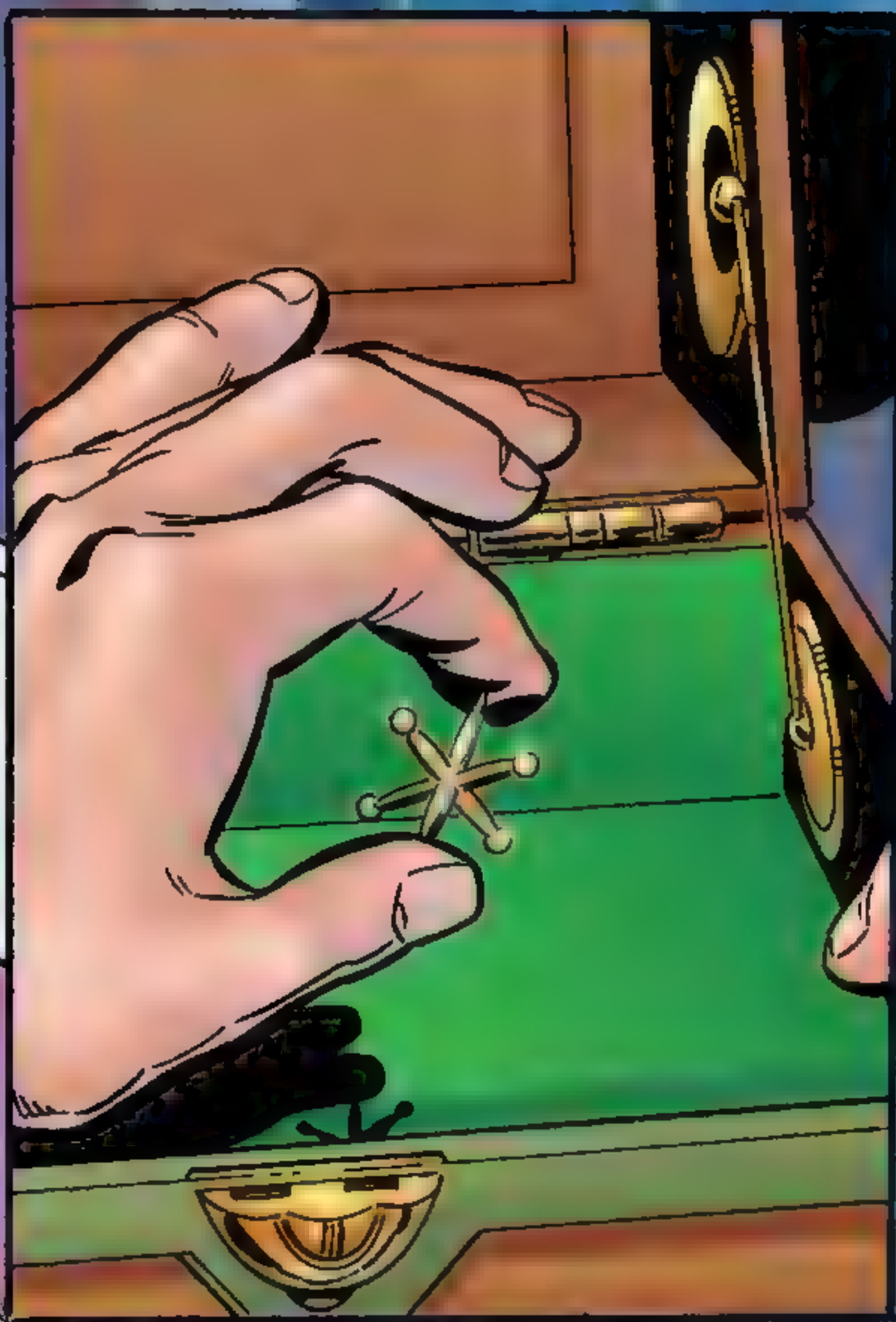
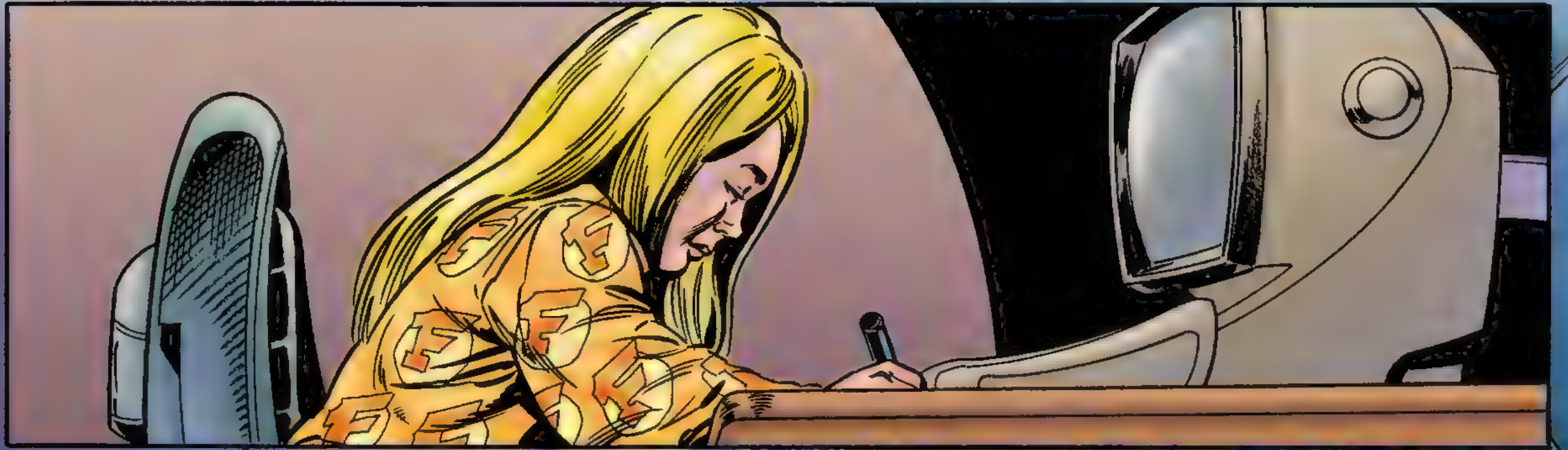
THE DIAGNOSTI-COMP
SAYS YOU'RE OKAY -- THAT
YOUR ENERGY FLUX IS
GOOD, EVEN WITHOUT
YOUR SPECIAL
FOODS.

MAYBE
WE WON'T
HAVE TO FEED
YOU ANY OF
THAT ANY
MORE.

BUT ACCORDING
TO THE READINGS,
YOU MUST HAVE
BEEN EATING
SOME AWFUL
STUFF -- !

CORN
DOGS,
PROB'LY. I
LIKE CORN
DOGS.







10





I LEFT BUCHANAN CORNERS IN EARLY SUMMER. IT WAS ALREADY HOT...



...BUT NOT AS HOT AS IT WAS GOING TO GET.



I'M SORRY, DAD. I KNOW I SHOULD HAVE FINISHED SCHOOL, BUT I JUST COULDN'T STAND IT ANY MORE. THE LOOKS, THE SMIRKS...

I FELT LIKE I WAS DESERTING YOU --

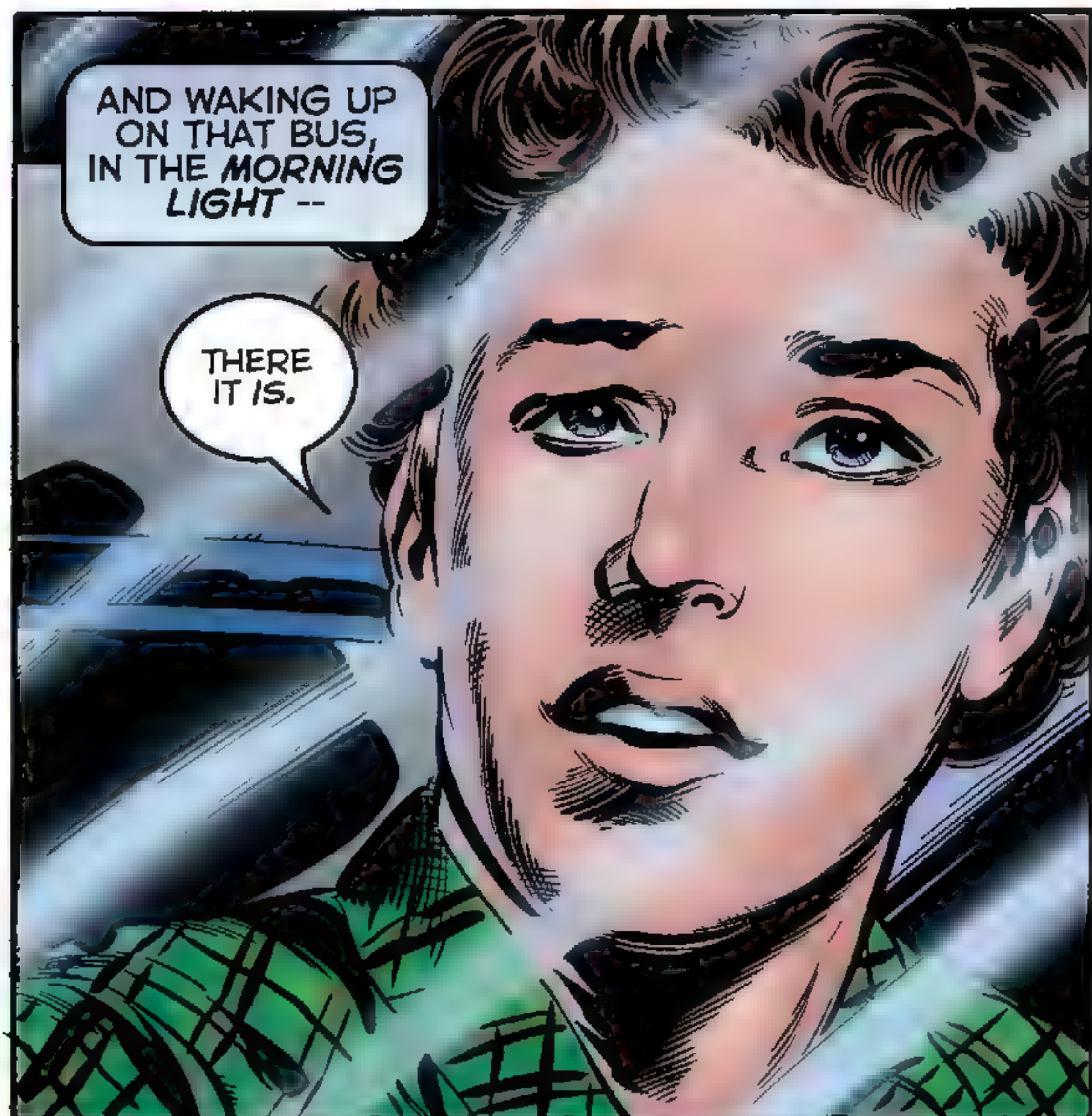
-- BUT AFTER THE WAY YOU --

OH, IT DOESN'T MATTER.



I JUST HAD TO GET OUT. I HAD TO STOP BEING "THE KINNEY BOY," AND FIND SOMEPLACE I COULD BE SOMEONE ELSE.

AND I DID.



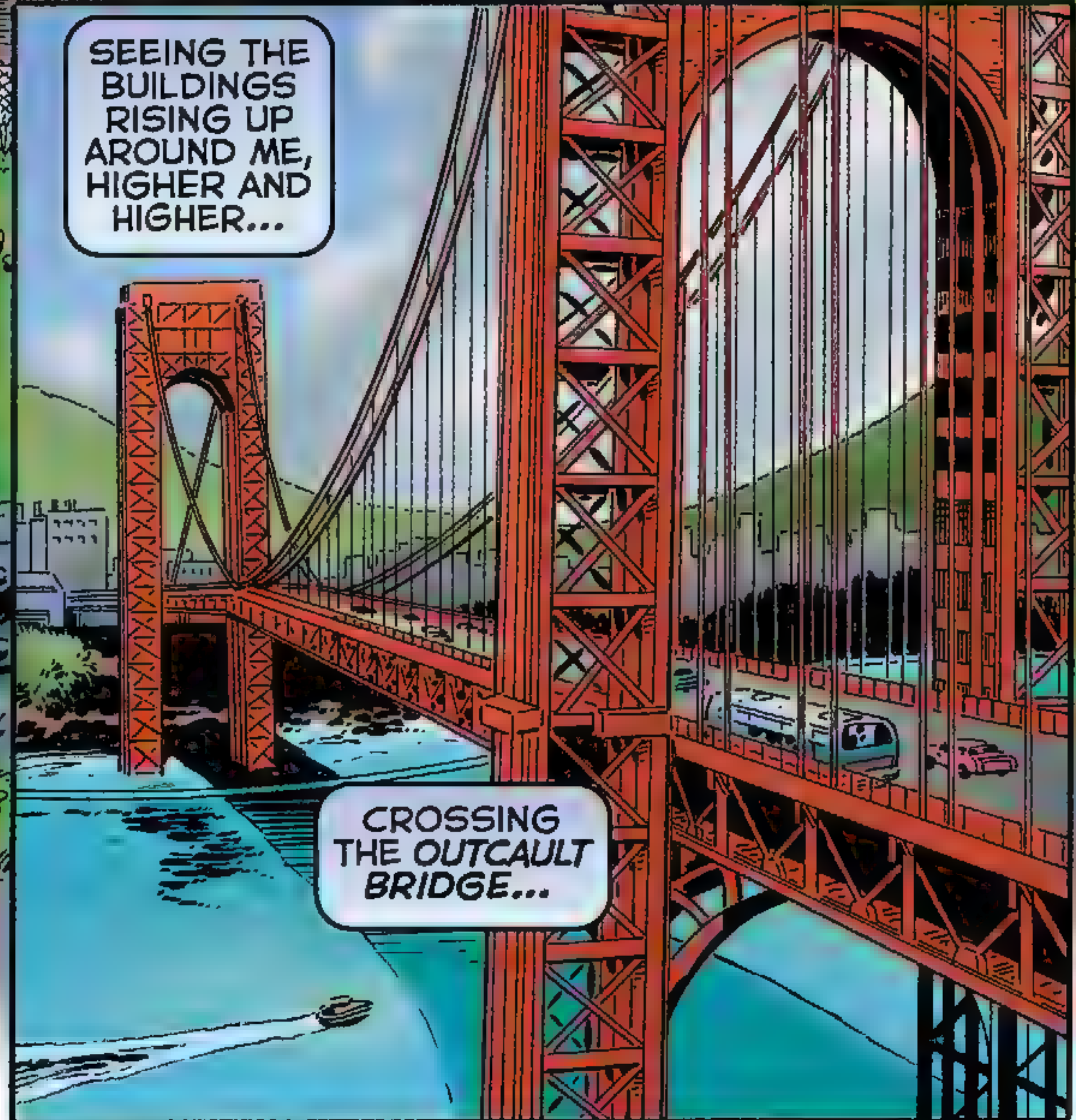
AND WAKING UP ON THAT BUS, IN THE MORNING LIGHT --

THERE IT IS.



-- IT WAS LIKE
A DREAM.

I WAS THERE.
I WAS REALLY
THERE.



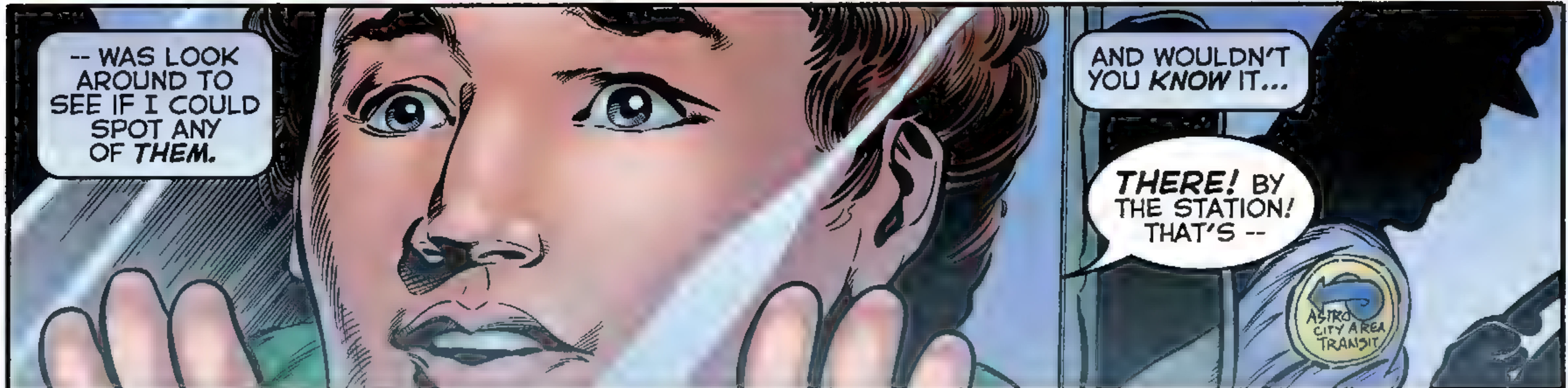
SEEING THE
BUILDINGS
RISING UP
AROUND ME,
HIGHER AND
HIGHER...

CROSSING
THE OUTCAULT
BRIDGE...



I WAS REALLY THERE.
BREATHING THE AIR
SEEING IT ALL, BEING
IN A PLACE I'D ONLY
READ ABOUT BEFORE.

I'LL TELL YOU,
THE FIRST
THING I DID --



-- WAS LOOK
AROUND TO
SEE IF I COULD
SPOT ANY
OF THEM.

AND WOULDN'T
YOU KNOW IT...

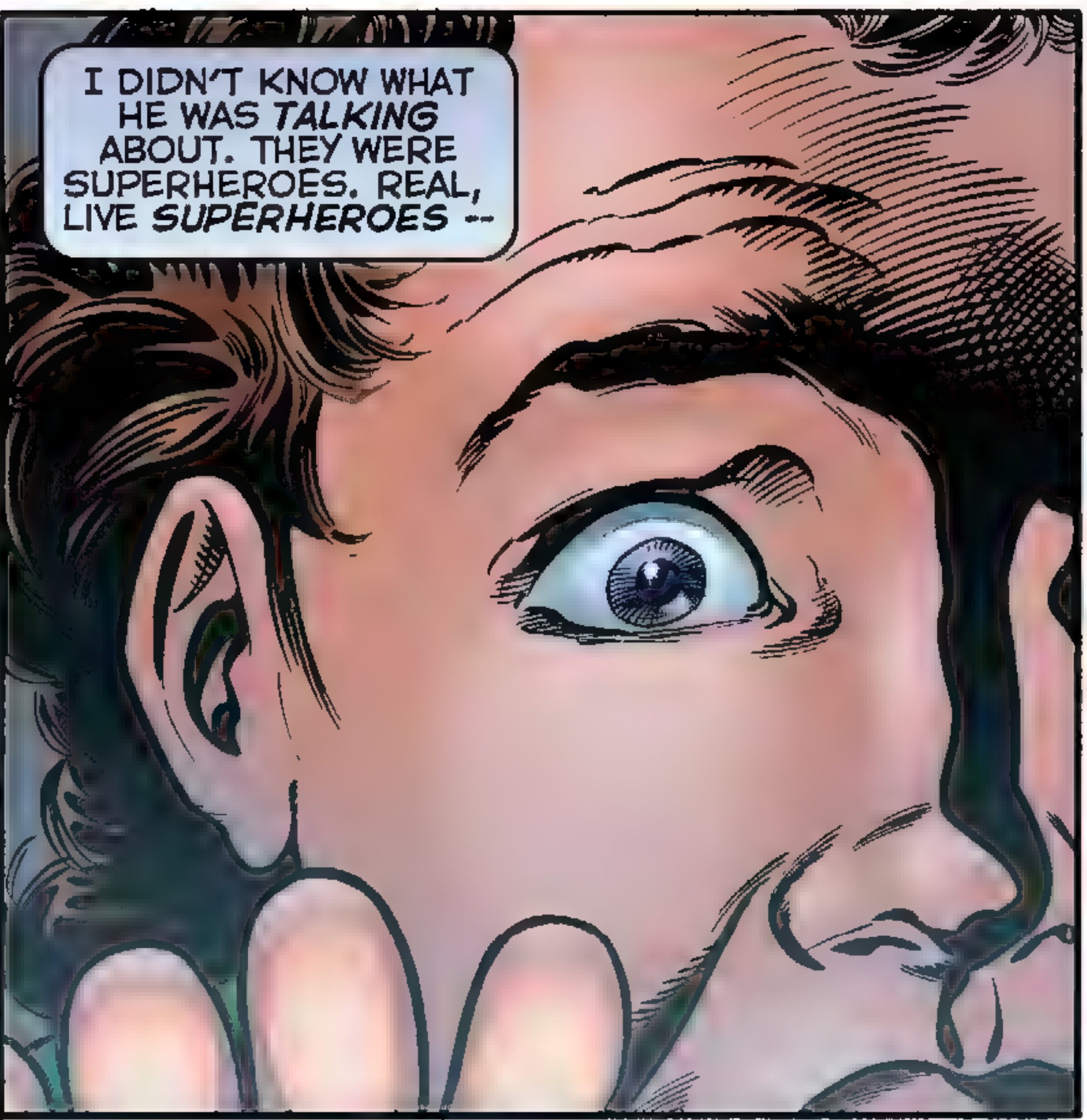
THERE! BY
THE STATION!
THAT'S --



YEAH. IT'S
THE JESUS
FREAKS.
AGAIN.

WHY
CAN'T THEY
PICK SOME
OTHER CORNER,
JUST ONCE?
JUST ONCE? A
DIFFERENT
TIME OF
DAY?

I AM
SO SICK
OF THOSE
JERKS...



I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT
HE WAS TALKING
ABOUT. THEY WERE
SUPERHEROES. REAL,
LIVE SUPERHEROES --

NEW KID IN TOWN

-- RIGHT
IN FRONT
OF ME!

-- DAY IS
COMING!
JUDGMENT
DAY! ARE YOU
PREPARED?

ARE
YOU SAVED?
HAVE YOU HEARD
THE WORD OF
JESUS?

IT'S
ALL IN THE
BIBLE -- ALL
YOU HAVE TO
DO IS READ
IT!

JUDGMENT
DAY IS COMING!
WILL YOU BE
READY?

ACCEPT
JESUS AS
YOUR SAVIOR!
ACCEPT HIS
WORD!

THE CROSSBREED.
THAT WAS WHAT THEY
CALLED THEMSELVES.
NOT THE JESUS FREAKS.
I READ THAT THEY BELIEVE
THEIR POWERS COME
FROM GOD, AND IT'S
THEIR DUTY TO USE
THEM IN HIS SERVICE.

THEY STOPPED
THE DEVIL'S OWN
IN MONTANA. AND
TEMBLOR IN
SAN FRANCISCO.

I'D LIKE TO
SEE SOME
BUS DRIVER
DO THAT!

I MEAN, SO
THEY'RE
RELIGIOUS. WHAT
DIFFERENCE
DID THAT --

HAVE
YOU BEEN
SAVED?

H-
Huh?

HAVE YOU
ACCEPTED JESUS
CHRIST AS YOUR
PERSONAL
SAVIOR?

ARE YOU
PREPARED
TO BE JUDGED
BY YOUR
MAKER?

UH, NOT
TODAY...

I, UH -- LOOK,
I'M NOT MUCH
OF A CHURCH-
GOER --

TAKE A
PAMPHLET.
READ THE
WORD.

HEY, LAF CADIO!
BACK OFF,
WILLYA --

-- CAN'T YOU
SEE YOU'RE
UNNERVIN'
THE KID?

Huh?

IT'S THE EYES, KID.
LOOKS LIKE HE'S
GONNA EATCHA,
DON'T HE?

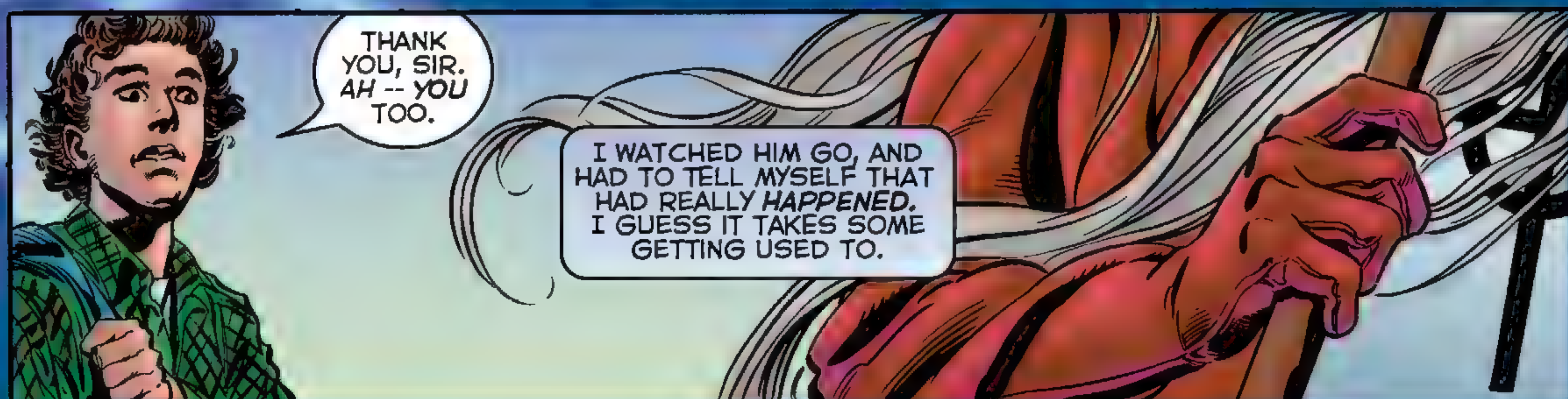
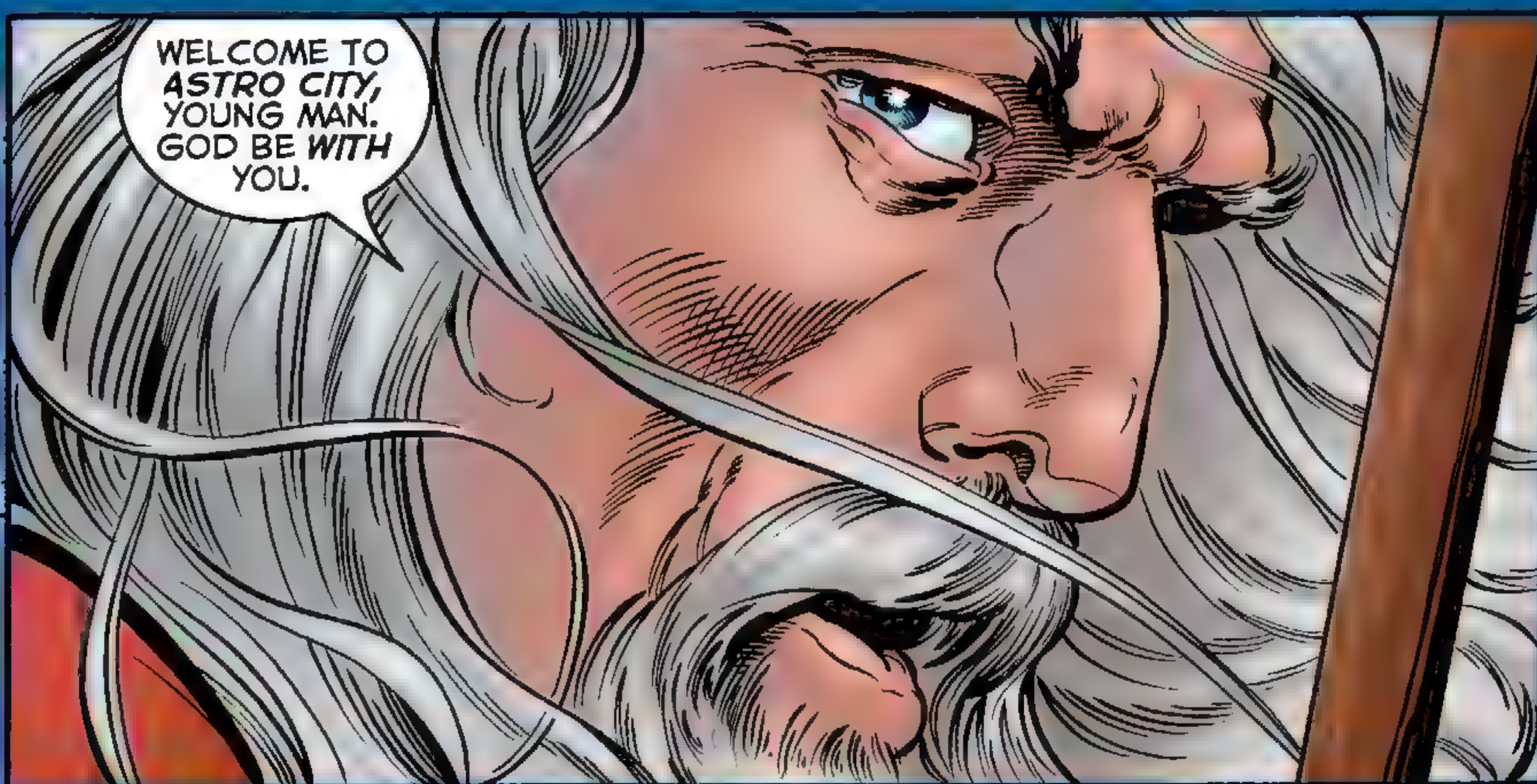
WELL,
DON'T WORRY.
THE J.F.'S ARE
ANNOYIN', BUT THEY'RE
HARMLESS -- 'LESS
YOU'RE ALLERGIC
TO PSALMS AN'
PREACHIN'!

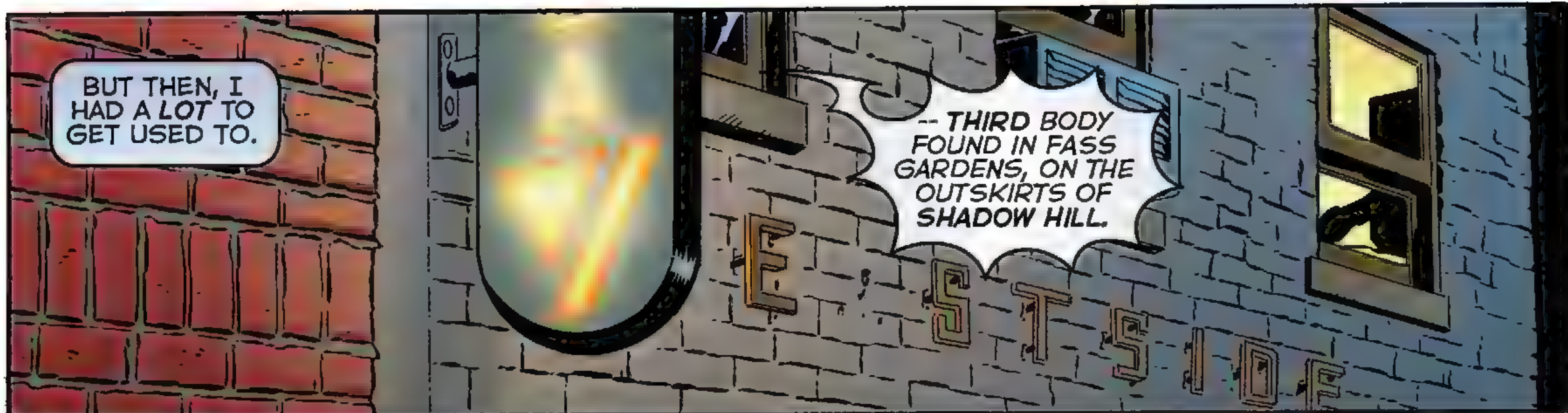
STILL, YOU
WANNA WATCH
YOURSELF --

-- THERE'S WORSE'N
THEM AROUND, AN'
YOU DON'T WANNA
LET YOUR GUARD
DOWN.

IT'S A
BIG CITY,
REMEMBER?

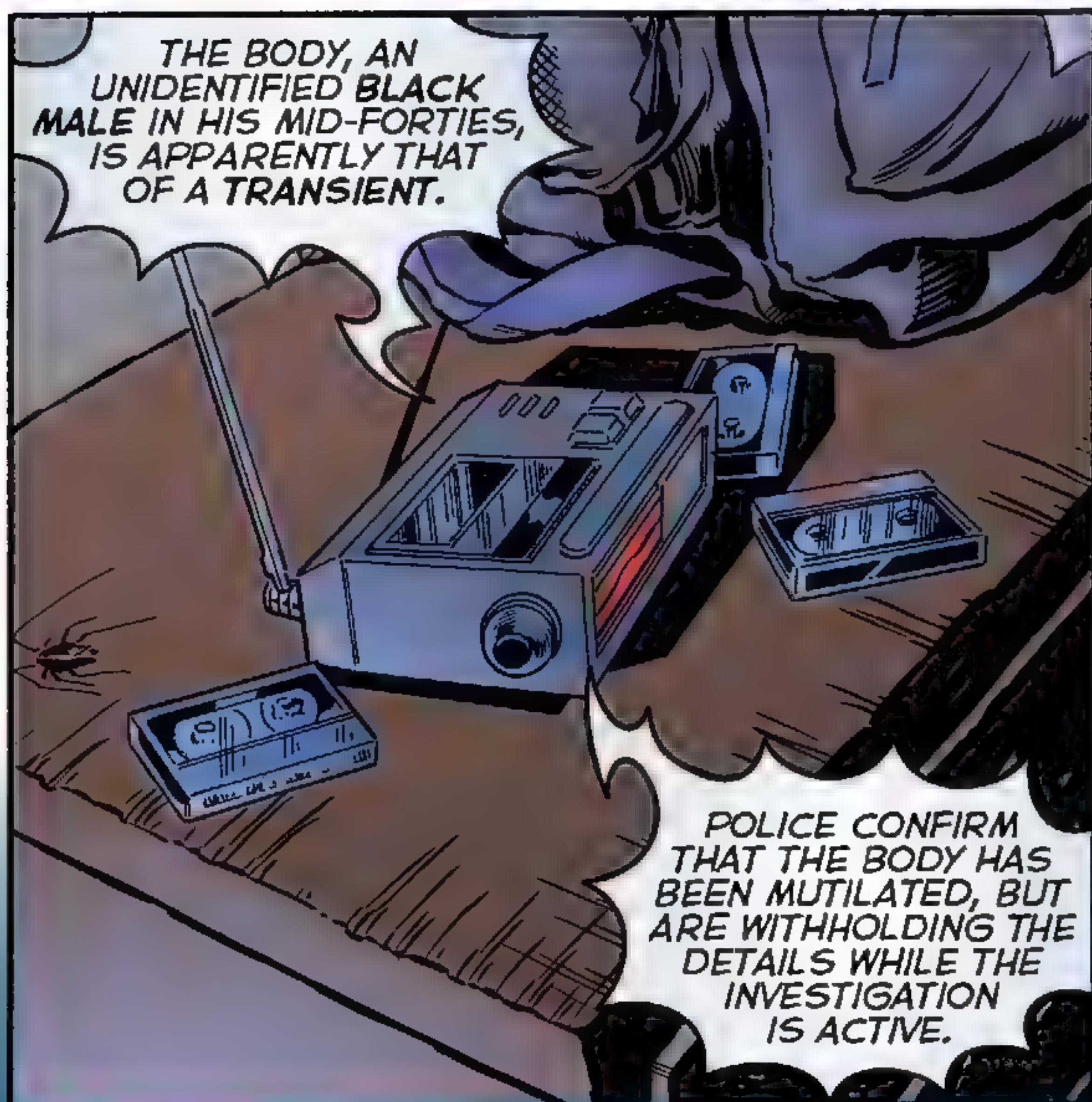
UH,
THANKS,
I'LL TRY
TO --





BUT THEN, I
HAD A LOT TO
GET USED TO.

-- THIRD BODY
FOUND IN FASS
GARDENS, ON THE
OUTSKIRTS OF
SHADOW HILL.



THE BODY, AN
UNIDENTIFIED BLACK
MALE IN HIS MID-FORTIES,
IS APPARENTLY THAT
OF A TRANSIENT.

POLICE CONFIRM
THAT THE BODY HAS
BEEN MUTILATED, BUT
ARE WITHHOLDING THE
DETAILS WHILE THE
INVESTIGATION
IS ACTIVE.



IN OTHER NEWS,
SAMARITAN WAS HONORED
BY THE ASTRO CITY
METROPOLITAN COUNCIL
OF SCHOOLS
TODAY --

-- FOR HIS RESCUE
OF A SCHOOL BUS FULL
OF THIRD GRADERS
LAST MONTH. THE
BANQUET, WHICH WAS
HELD AT --

IT WAS SUCH
A BIG PLACE.



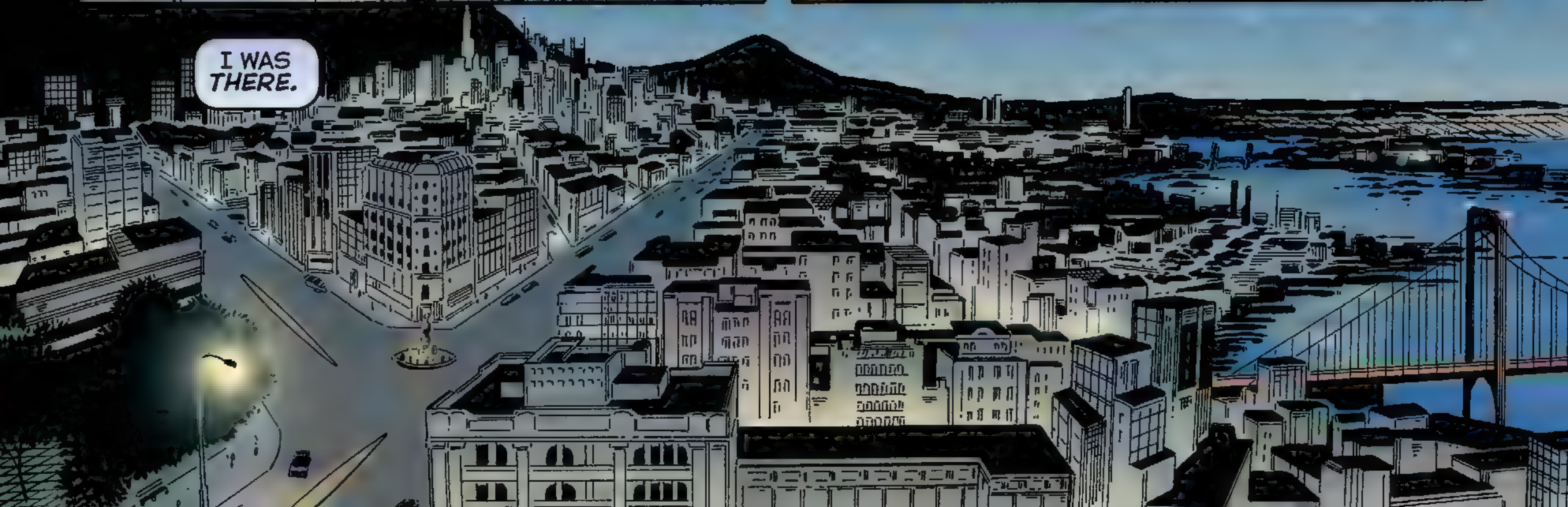
I FELT *TINY* THERE,
SURROUNDED BY MILES OF
CONCRETE AND SHADOWS, BY
MILLIONS OF STRANGERS.

I DIDN'T *KNOW* ANYONE.
I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW
WHAT'S AROUND THE
CORNER. IT WAS ALL...
OVERPOWERING.



BUT I COULD GET
USED TO IT. I KNEW
THAT. IT WAS JUST A
LITTLE SCARY BECAUSE
IT WASN'T FAMILIAR
YET. BUT IT *WOULD* BE.

I WAS THERE.
THAT'S WHAT
COUNTED.



I WAS
THERE.

THE NEXT DAY, I
STARTED TO GET
TO KNOW THE CITY.

IT'S DIFFERENT, LOOKING
AT STREETS AND BUILDINGS,
THAN IT IS READING ABOUT
THEM IN **GUIDEBOOKS**.

SO I LOOKED AT
THEM. AND I GOT A
FEEL FOR THEM. AND
MORE AND MORE, AS I
WANDERED AROUND --

-- I FOUND MYSELF
LOOKING TO THE SKY.

YOU MUST
BE FROM OUT
OF TOWN.

HUH?

WE DON'T **SEE** THEM
EVERY DAY. THEY'RE
AROUND, SURE, BUT IT'S
JUST **SOMETIMES**
YOU SEE THEM.

WAS I **THAT**
OBTUSOUS?

HOT
RETZEL
55¢

A LITTLE,
MAYBE. BUT IT
WEARS OFF. I'VE
BEEN HERE TEN
YEARS, AND MOST
OF THE TIME, THIS
COULD BE ANY
ORDINARY --

-- OH,
LOOK!

IT'S THE
FIRST FAMILY --
IN A TEARING
HURRY! I WONDER
WHERE THEY'RE
GOING -- ?

SODAS

FOOT LONGS

YEAH, IT
WORE OFF.

YOU COULD
TELL...



IT WAS A COUPLE OF *WEEKS* BEFORE I FOUND THE PLACE I WAS LOOKING FOR. I'D READ ABOUT IT IN *JOHNNY CRASH'S MEMOIRS*.

IT WAS IN A *CRUDDY, DANGEROUS* NEIGHBORHOOD -- BUT I GUESS THAT GAVE THEM THE *PRIVACY* THEY WANTED.

NOBODY BOTHERED ME, THOUGH. MAYBE THEY COULD TELL THAT I KNEW HOW TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF.

MAYBE IT WAS IN THE WAY I *WALKED*, OR SOMETHING.

I HOPED SO, ANYWAY. FIVE YEARS OF *BIKING* TWENTY MILES TO THE ONLY *DOJO* IN *HOOD COUNTY* OUGHT TO COUNT FOR *SOMETHING*.

ch-WING



WE'RE NOT OPEN YET.

UH -- I'M HERE ABOUT THE *JOB*?

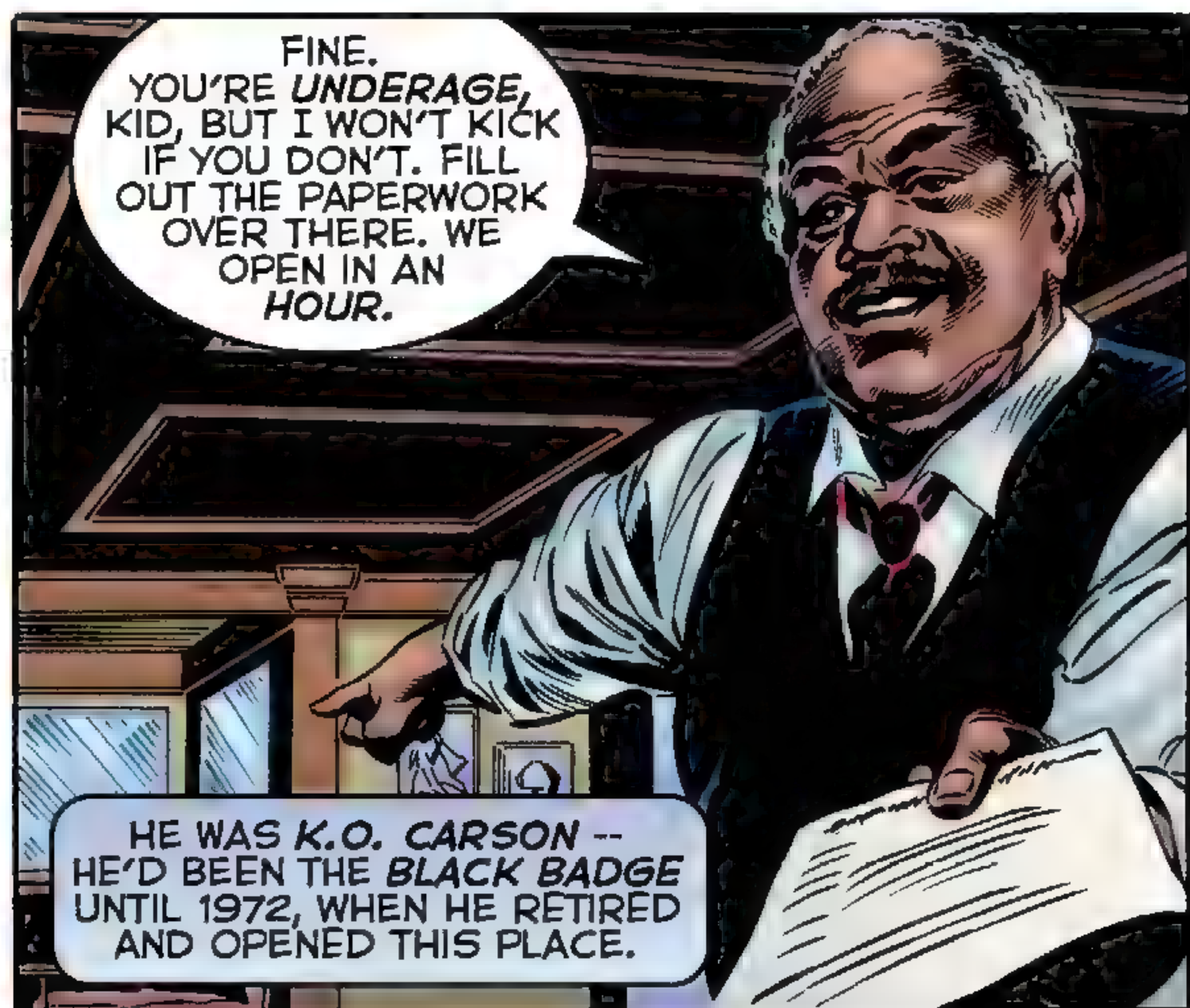
THERE WAS AN AD IN THE PAPER?



YEAH? YOU WASHED *DISHES* BEFORE? BUSSED *TABLES*? YOU FAST ON YOUR *FEET*?

YOU CAN GET OUT OF THE WAY IF *TROUBLE* STARTS?

YES, YES, I LIKE TO *THINK* SO -- AND TRY ME.



FINE. YOU'RE *UNDERAGE*, KID, BUT I WON'T KICK IF YOU DON'T. FILL OUT THE *PAPERWORK* OVER THERE. WE OPEN IN AN *HOUR*.

HE WAS *K.O. CARSON* -- HE'D BEEN THE *BLACK BADGE* UNTIL 1972, WHEN HE RETIRED AND OPENED THIS PLACE.



HE'D FOUGHT CRIME
IN BAKERVILLE FOR
YEARS. AND NOW --

-- NOW HE'D
GIVEN ME
A JOB...



HEY,
K.O. --
HOW'S IT
HANGIN'?

COUPLE A'
LONG-NECKS
FOR ME, AND A
FLAGON A' THAT
IMPORTED SWILL
YOU KEEP FOR
MY OVERSIZED
BUDDY
HERE!

"**SWILL!**" YOU
HAVE NO TASTE
FOR THE **FINER**
THINGS IN LIFE,
JULIE...

BET YOUR
ASS I DON'T. NOT
IF THEY'RE BREWED
OUTTA **SEAWEED**,
ANYWAY!

THE PLACE FILLED UP
FAST. **JULIUS FURST**
AND **REX** WERE THE
FIRST TO COME IN --



-- BUT THERE
WERE PLENTY
OF OTHERS.

SLEDGEHAMMER
WAS THERE, AND
ROCKSLIDE --

-- AND EVEN GUYS
LIKE **KRUNCH**, AND
OUT-OF-TOWNERS
LIKE **WRESTLA** AND
THE **LUMMOX** --



I STAYED PRETTY **BUSY**,
BUSSING TABLES, SERVING
BEERS, REFILLING
POPCORN BASKETS ...

...I COULDN'T **BELIEVE**
HOW FAST THE POPCORN
DISAPPEARED...



BUT STILL, I
TOOK IN AS MUCH
AS I COULD WHILE
I WAS WORKING.

AND THERE
WAS PLENTY
TO SEE...



SO. THINK I MIGHT BEAT YOU TONIGHT, OLD-TIMER?

Pfah! YOU'LL NEVER BEAT ME IF I DON'T LET YOU, YOU YOUNG WHIPPER-SNAPPER!

I'VE GOT ME A GOOD HEAD OF STEAM -- AND I'M READY FOR ANYTHING! LET'S US JUST SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO!

AND THERE WERE SOME I'D NEVER HEARD OF...



OVER THERE WITH REX -- WHO'S THAT?

THAT'S **IRONHORSE**, KID, THE HUMAN LOCOMOTIVE. ONE OF THE OLDEST OF US ALL. HE KEEPS TO HIMSELF, MOSTLY --

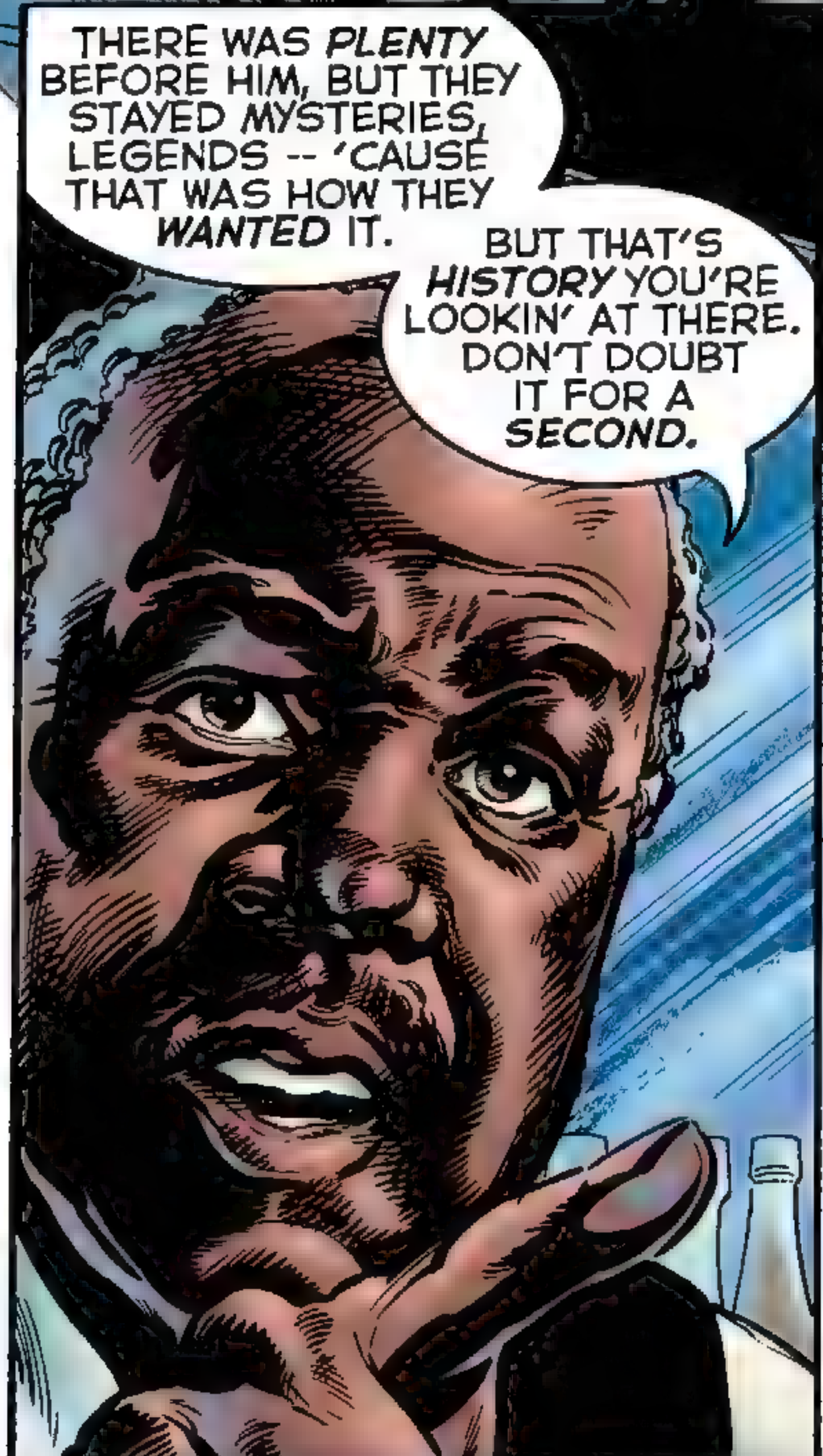
-- BUT HE'S BEEN AROUND SINCE 1862, GIVE OR TAKE A DECADE.



1862?! BUT I THOUGHT **AIR ACE** WAS THE FIRST --

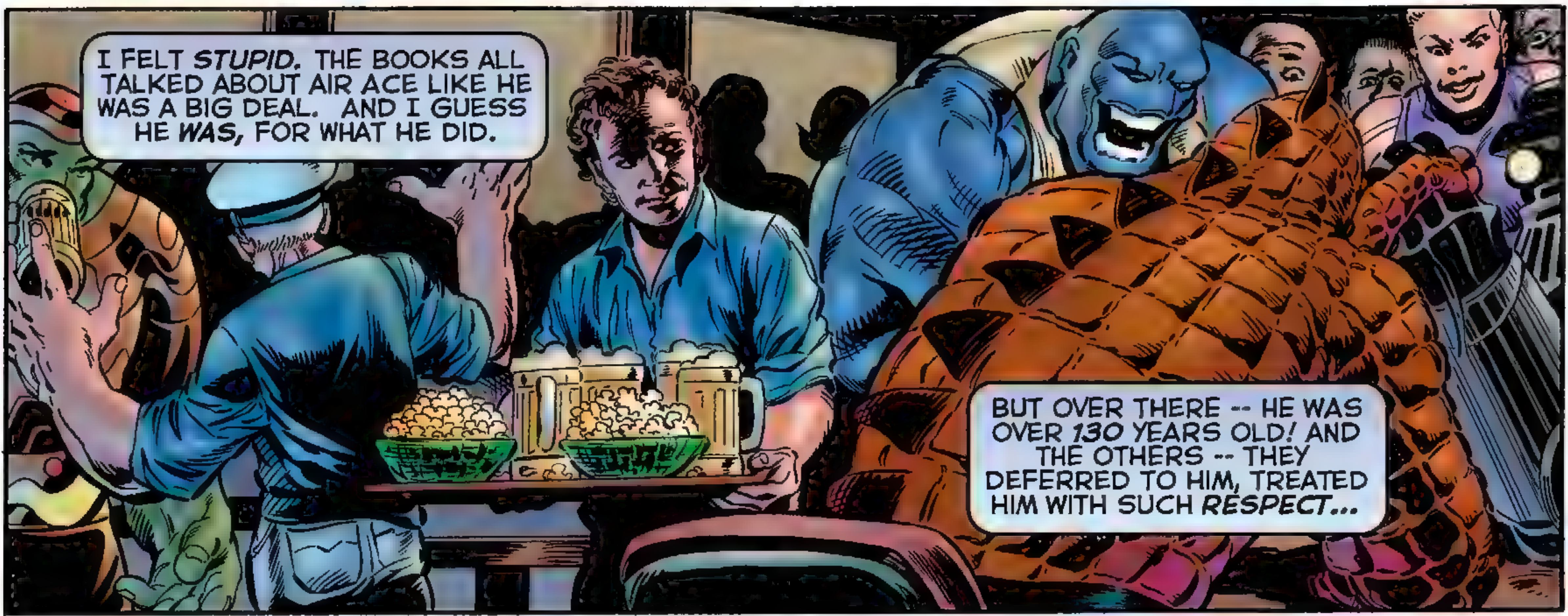
STOP AND THINK, KID. YOU KNOW ABOUT THE OLD SOLDIER. YOU KNOW ABOUT THE **HANGED MAN**.

AND YOU STILL THINK **AIR ACE** WAS THE FIRST, JUST 'CAUSE HE WAS THE FIRST TO GET HIS NAME IN THE PAPERS?



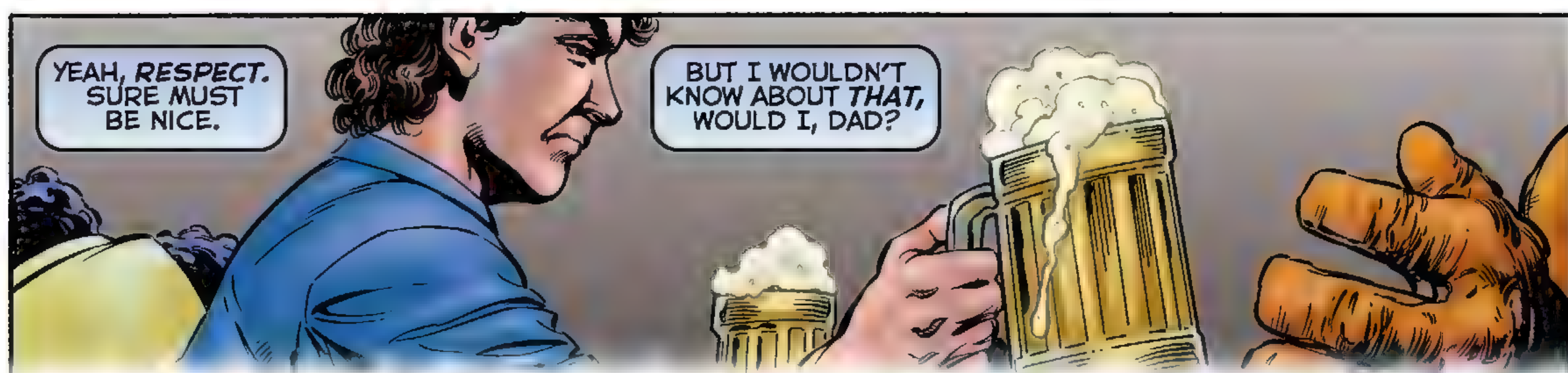
THERE WAS PLENTY BEFORE HIM, BUT THEY STAYED MYSTERIES, LEGENDS -- 'CAUSE THAT WAS HOW THEY WANTED IT.

BUT THAT'S HISTORY YOU'RE LOOKIN' AT THERE. DON'T DOUBT IT FOR A SECOND.



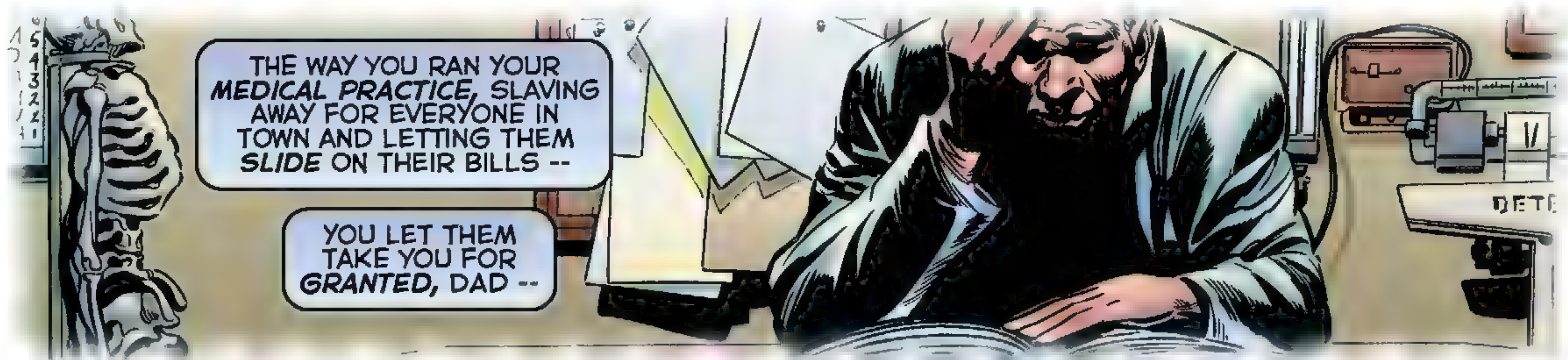
I FELT STUPID. THE BOOKS ALL TALKED ABOUT **AIR ACE** LIKE HE WAS A BIG DEAL. AND I GUESS HE WAS, FOR WHAT HE DID.

BUT OVER THERE -- HE WAS OVER 130 YEARS OLD! AND THE OTHERS -- THEY DEFERRED TO HIM, TREATED HIM WITH SUCH RESPECT...



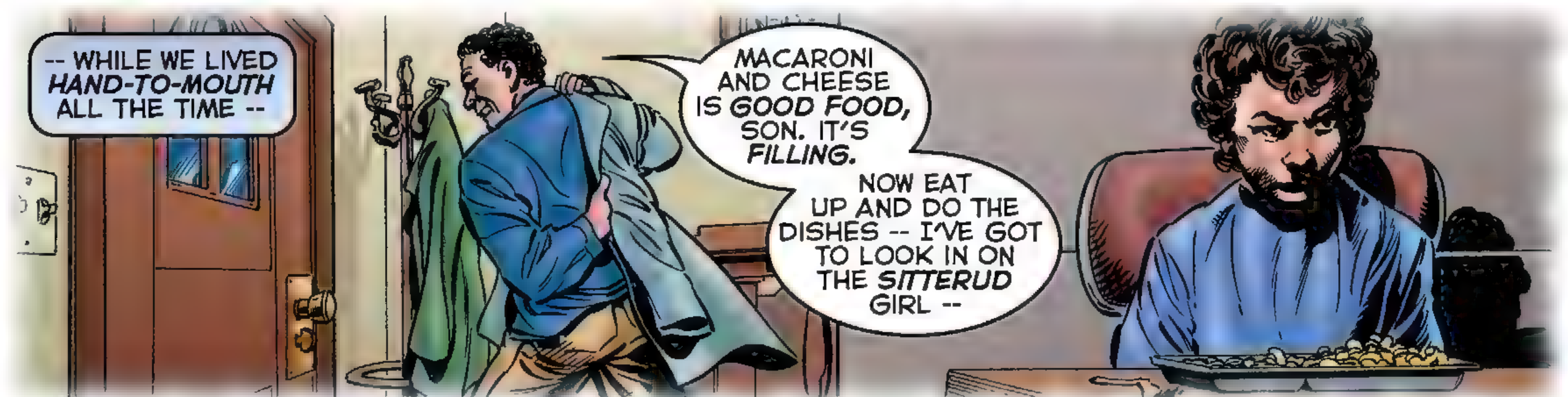
YEAH, RESPECT.
SURE MUST
BE NICE.

BUT I WOULDN'T
KNOW ABOUT *THAT*,
WOULD I, DAD?



THE WAY YOU RAN YOUR
MEDICAL PRACTICE, SLAVING
AWAY FOR EVERYONE IN
TOWN AND LETTING THEM
SLIDE ON THEIR BILLS --

YOU LET THEM
TAKE YOU FOR
GRANTED, DAD --



-- WHILE WE LIVED
HAND-TO-MOUTH
ALL THE TIME --

MACARONI
AND CHEESE
IS GOOD FOOD,
SON. IT'S
FILLING.

NOW EAT
UP AND DO THE
DISHES -- I'VE GOT
TO LOOK IN ON
THE *SITTERUD*
GIRL --



AND THEN YOU DIED OWING THOUSANDS,
AND THEY CALLED YOU A *DEADBEAT* --

-- SUCH A
SHAME --

-- NO
HORSE-SENSE
AT ALL --

-- AND THE
BOY'S JUST
LIKE HIM --



-- AND I WENT TO THE
COUNTY ORPHANAGE,
WHERE I LEARNED WHAT
THEY SAID ABOUT YOU
BEHIND YOUR BACK.

THEY DIDN'T EVEN THINK OF YOU
AS A GOOD MAN WHO GAVE THEM
MEDICAL CARE EVEN WHEN
THEY COULDN'T AFFORD IT --



-- NO, THEY
THOUGHT YOU
WERE A FOOL
AND A LOSER --

YOU
TAKE THAT
BACK!

-- AND THEY THOUGHT
I WASN'T GONNA TURN
OUT ANY DIFFERENT.

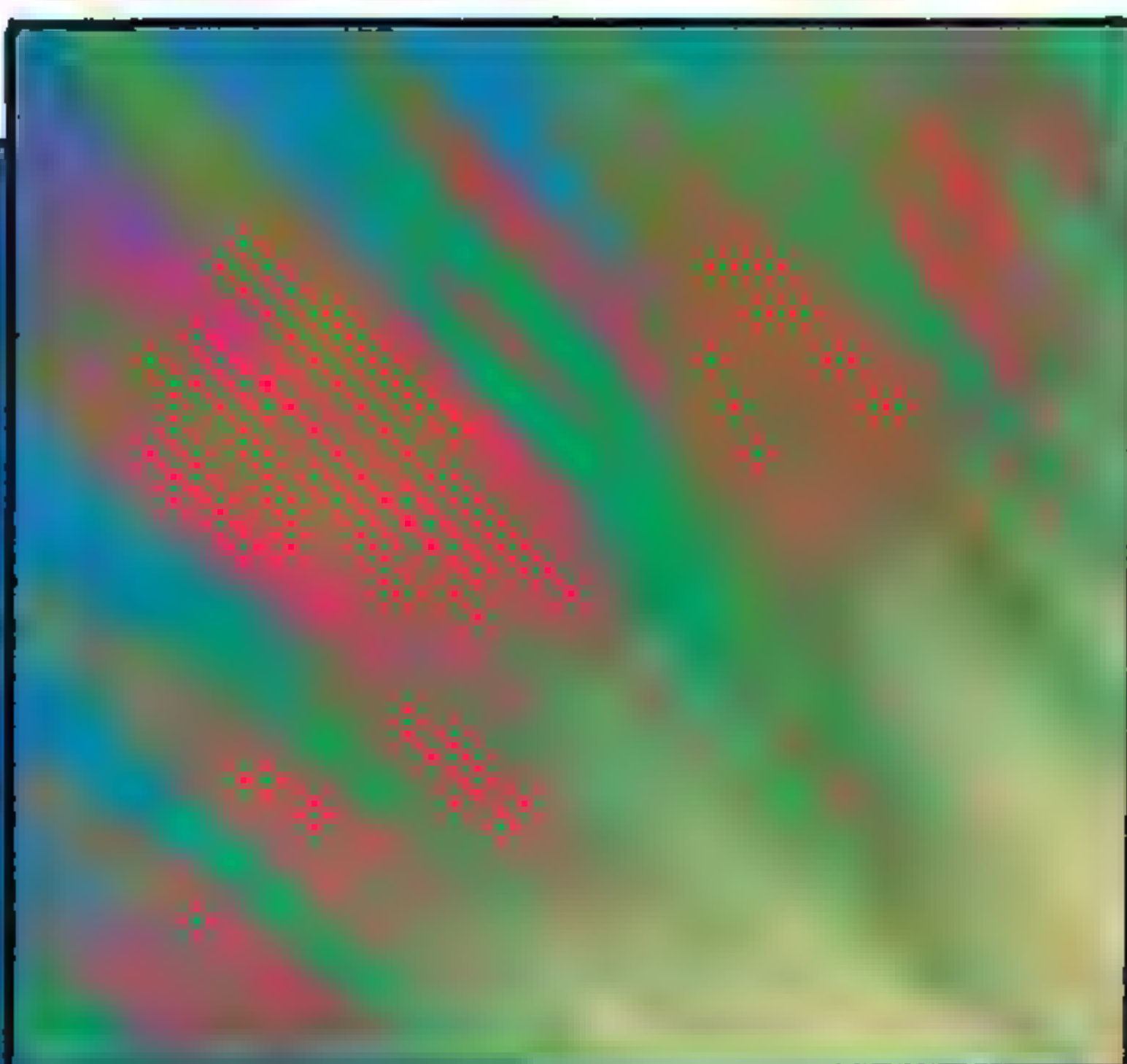


WELL, LET 'EM!

I HAD A PLAN. I WASN'T GONNA MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES YOU DID, DAD. I WAS GONNA BE SOMEBODY --



HUH?



Oh...



I WATCHED HIM MOVE -- SO CONFIDENT, SO ASSURED.

JACK-IN-THE-BOX. EVEN IN A CLOWN SUIT, PEOPLE RESPECTED HIM. THEY TRUSTED HIM -- SOME WERE SCARED OF HIM, MAYBE --



-- BUT *RESPECT?*
HE HAD THAT IN
SPADES.



SOMEDAY.

SOMEDAY.

YOU DIDN'T
ASK FOR ANY
AUTOGRAPHS.

YOU DIDN'T
BRING A *CAMERA*
AND TAKE
PICTURES.

HUH? NO,
OF COURSE
NOT. WHY
WOULD I?

THE THING IS, KID, YOU'RE
TOO *SMART* TO BE BUSSIN'
TABLES AN' SCHLEPPIN'
POPCORN IN A
BEER JOINT.

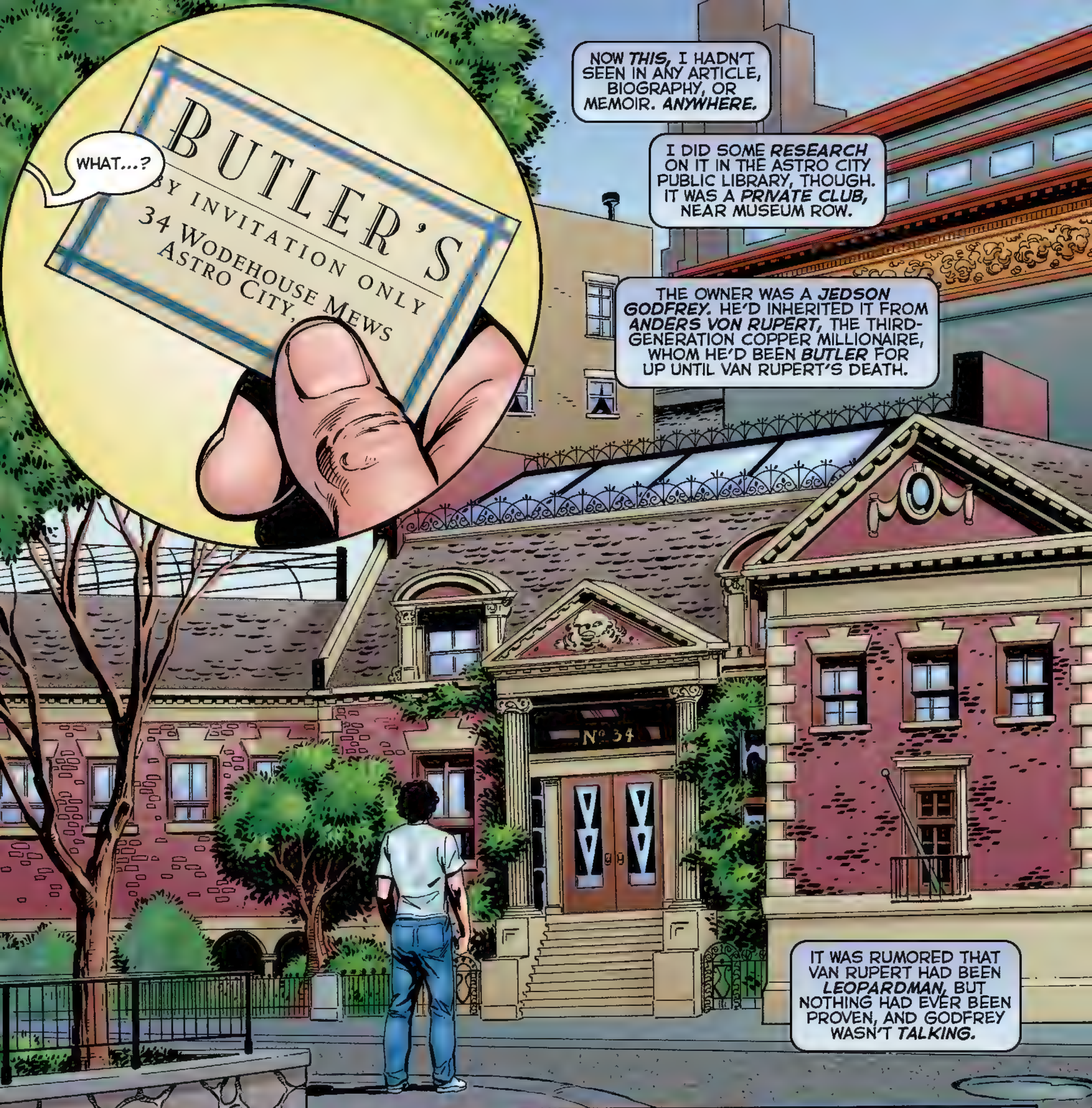
IF YOU'RE
NOT HERE FOR
SOUVENIRS, OR FOR
A NEWS STORY, THEN
YOU MUST BE HERE
FOR *ANOTHER*
REASON.

HEY,
LOOK,
I --

DON'T WORRY, I'M
NOT GOING TO TRY
TO TALK YOU OUT
OF IT.

BUT
YOU'RE IN THE
WRONG *PLACE*.
THESE AREN'T THE
RIGHT KIND OF
COSTUMES.

HERE, TAKE
THIS. TELL 'EM I
SENT YOU OVER.
I DON'T KNOW IF
THEY HAVE ANY
OPENINGS,
BUT...



WHAT...?

BUTLER'S
BY INVITATION ONLY
34 WODEHOUSE MEWS
ASTRO CITY, ASTRO CITY

NOW *THIS*, I HADN'T SEEN IN ANY ARTICLE, BIOGRAPHY, OR MEMOIR. ANYWHERE.

I DID SOME RESEARCH ON IT IN THE ASTRO CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY, THOUGH. IT WAS A *PRIVATE CLUB*, NEAR MUSEUM ROW.

THE OWNER WAS A *JEDSON GODFREY*. HE'D INHERITED IT FROM *ANDERS VON RUPERT*, THE THIRD-GENERATION COPPER MILLIONAIRE, WHOM HE'D BEEN *BUTLER* FOR UP UNTIL VAN RUPERT'S DEATH.

IT WAS RUMORED THAT VAN RUPERT HAD BEEN *LEOPARDMAN*, BUT NOTHING HAD EVER BEEN PROVEN, AND GODFREY WASN'T TALKING.

FROM WHAT I COULD TELL, BUTLER'S WAS VERY EXCLUSIVE. NO *MEMBERSHIP* LISTS, NO PUBLICLY-LISTED *EVENTS*.

JUST A LITTLE *OWNERSHIP* INFORMATION AND SOME *LICENSES*.

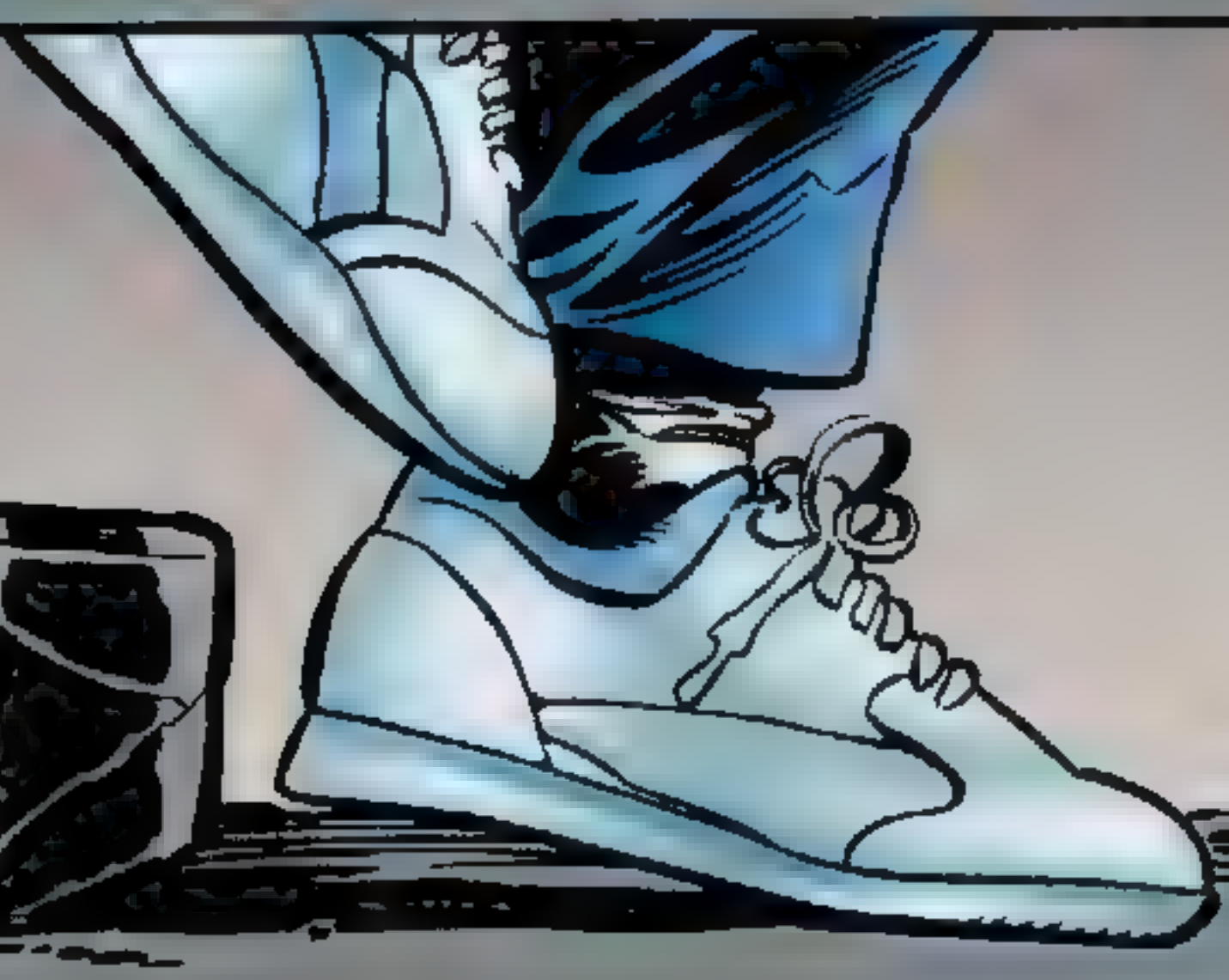
K.O. TOLD ME THEY HAD AN *EMPATH* THERE -- THAT IF I WASN'T TRUSTWORTHY, I WOULDN'T GET *IN* --

-- AND MIGHT NOT EVEN REMEMBER GOING *THERE*.

MAYBE HE WASN'T TELLING THE TRUTH, JUST TRYING TO MAKE SURE I TOOK IT *SERIOUSLY*. IF SO, IT SURE *WORKED*.

WELL...

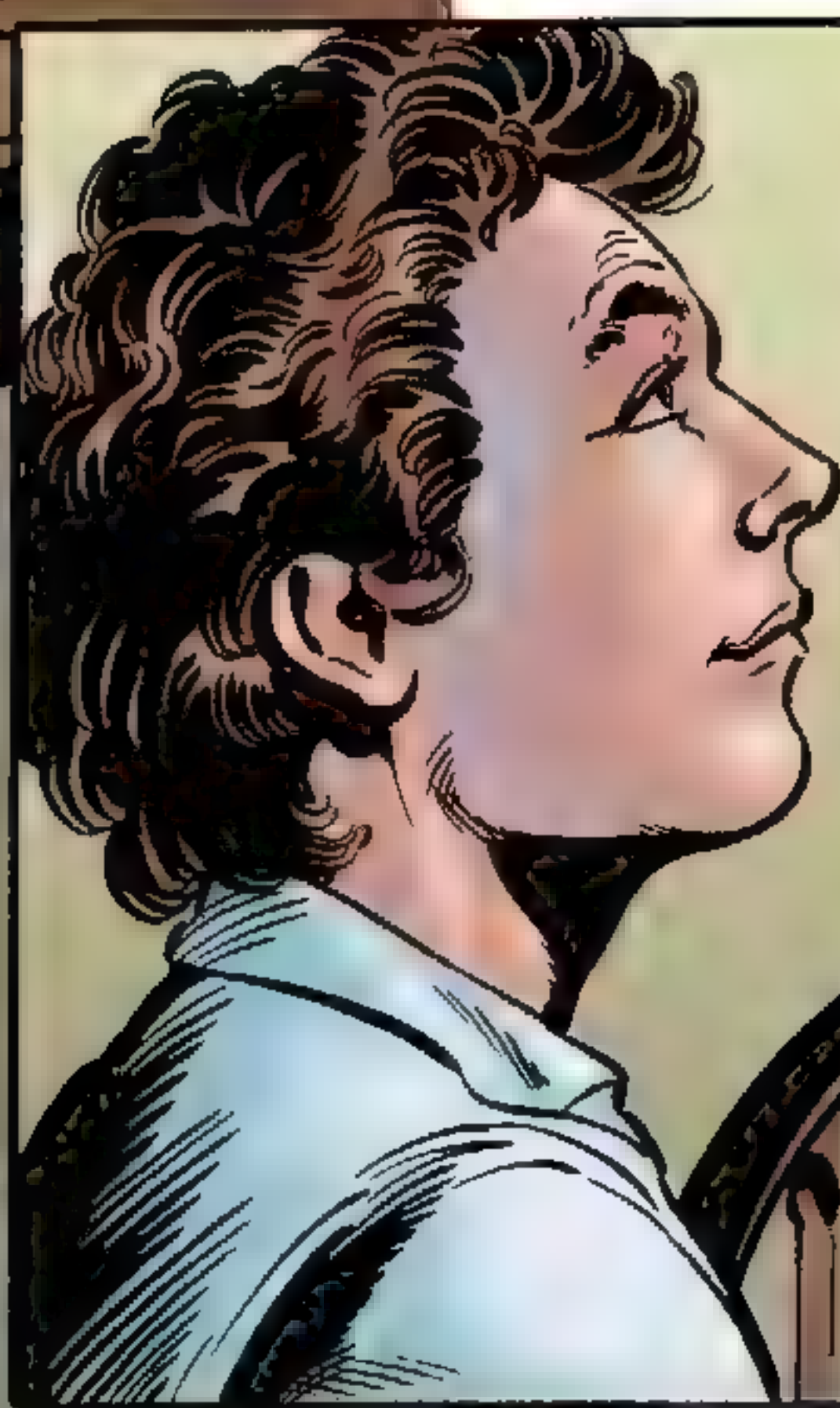
...HERE GOES NOTHING.





GOOD AFTERNOON. YOU COME HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.

WE DO HAVE AN OPENING FOR A BUSBOY, IF YOU'D CARE FOR IT.



THE SHIFT RUNS FIVE IN THE AFTERNOON UNTIL ONE IN THE MORNING. FOUR DAYS A WEEK, TO START.

WE PAY TRIPLE MINIMUM WAGE, AND A HANDSOME BENEFITS PACKAGE. MISS KENNEALY WILL GO OVER IT WITH YOU.



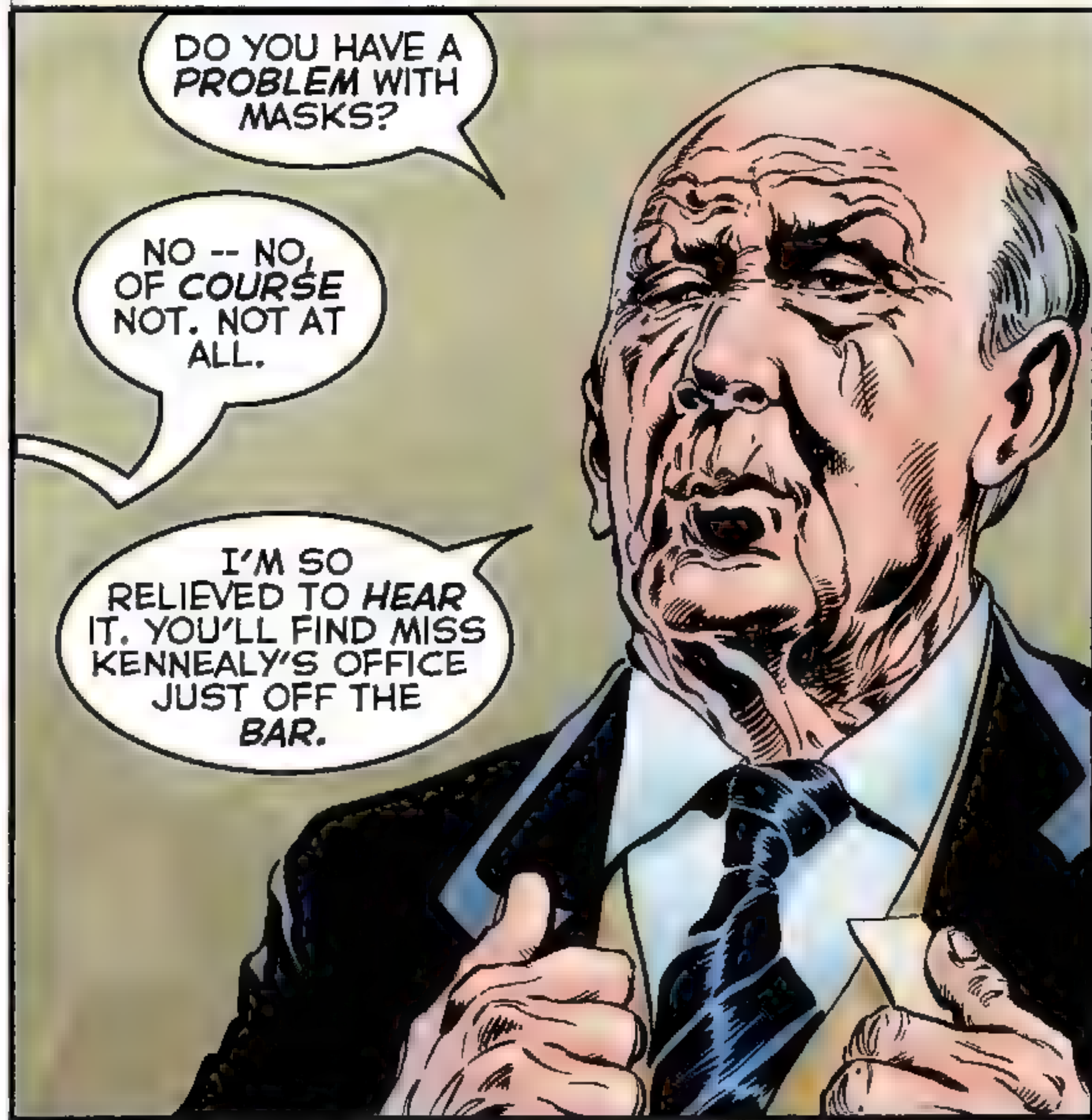
WE EXPECT PROMPTNESS, DILIGENCE AND CIRCUMSPECTION. THIS IS A PRIVATE CLUB. IS THAT ACCEPTABLE TO YOU?

UH -- YES. IT SOUNDS GREAT!

HOW NICE. HERE'S YOUR MASK.



MASK? WE, UH, WEAR MASKS?



DO YOU HAVE A PROBLEM WITH MASKS?

NO -- NO, OF COURSE NOT. NOT AT ALL.

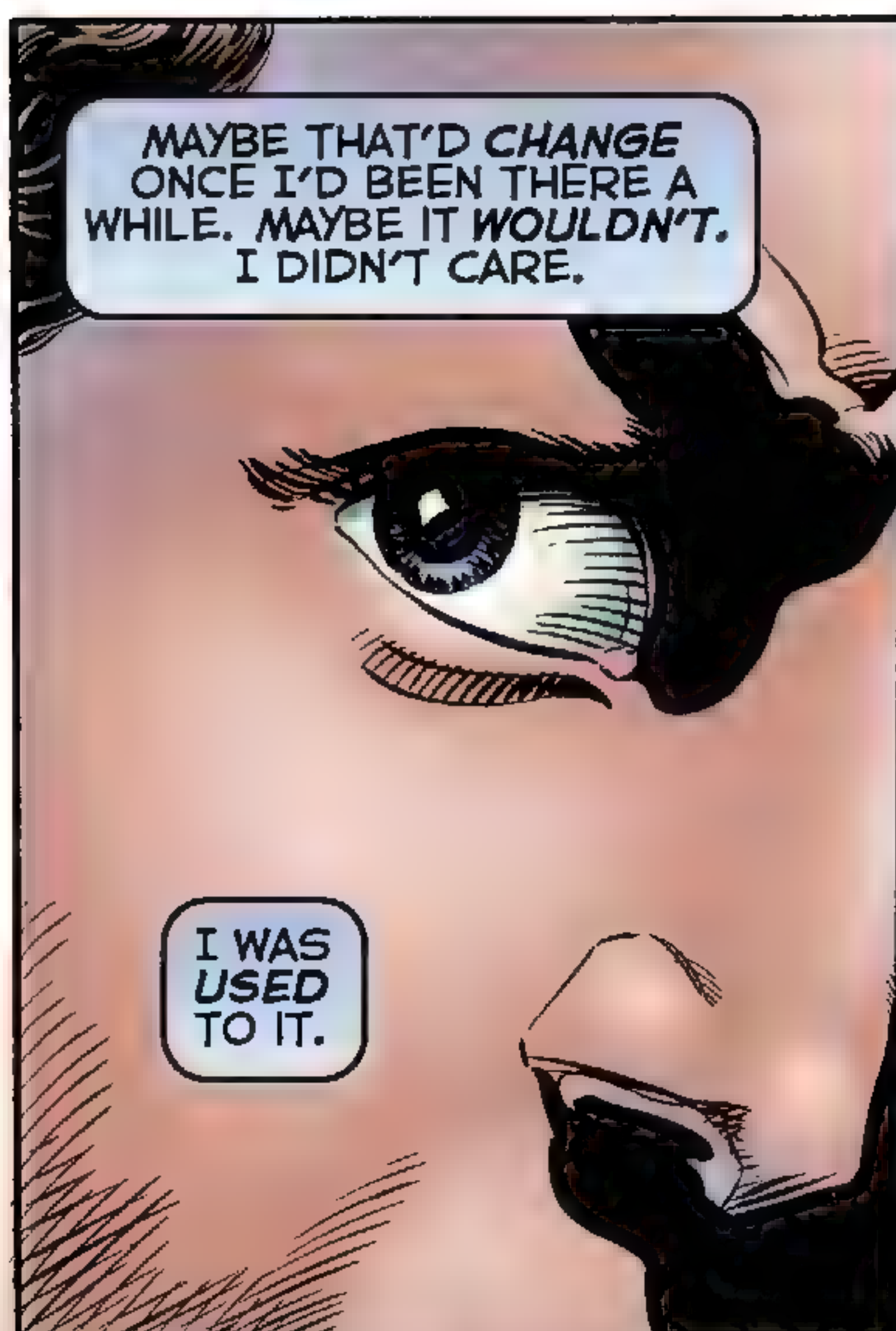
I'M SO RELIEVED TO HEAR IT. YOU'LL FIND MISS KENNEALY'S OFFICE JUST OFF THE BAR.



I DIDN'T HAVE TO LOOK TO KNOW THE OTHER BUSBOYS WERE EYEING ME AS I PASSED THE KITCHEN.

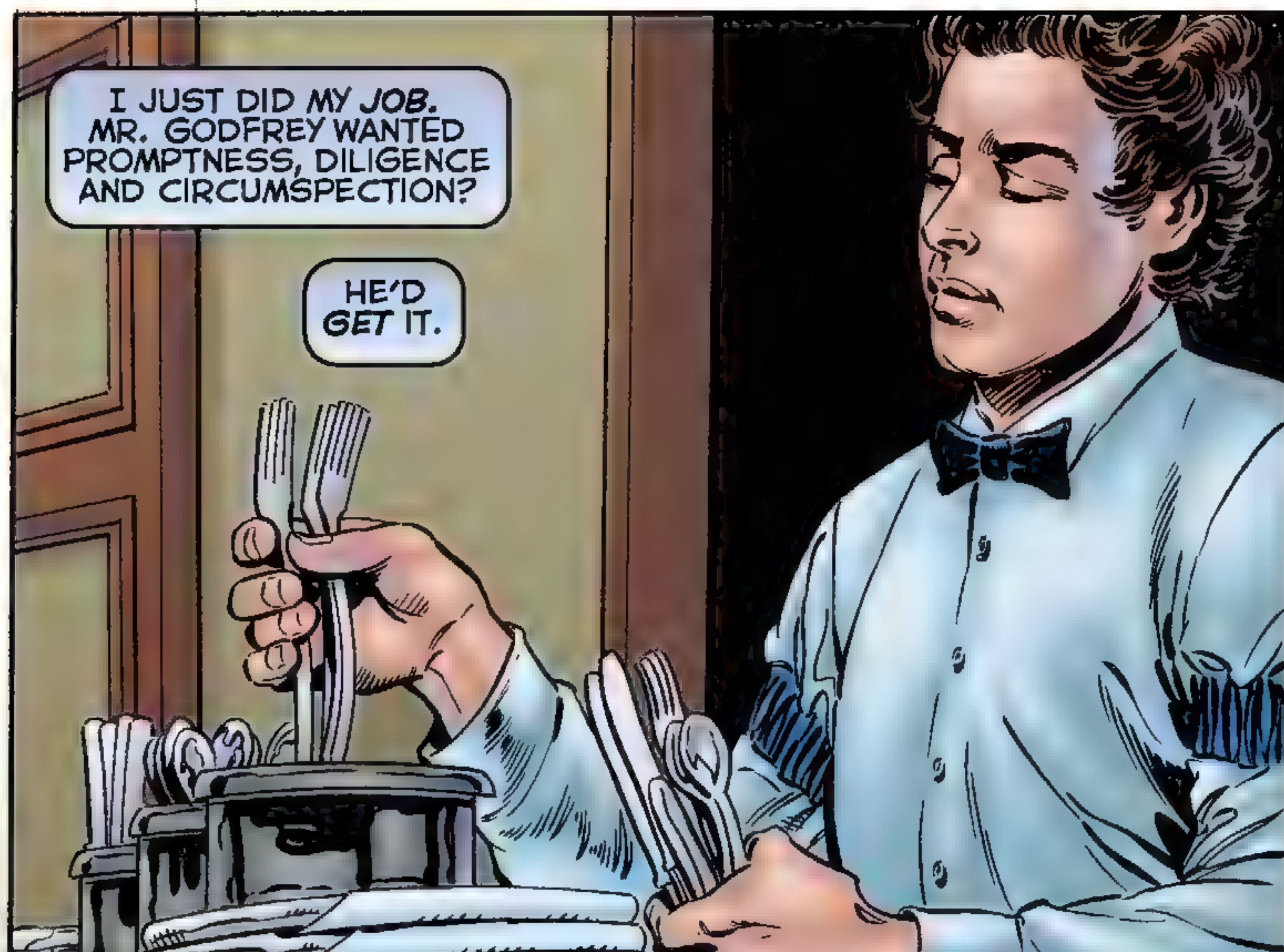


I COULD FEEL IT. TO THEM, I WAS AN INTRUDER -- A POTENTIAL THREAT.



MAYBE THAT'D CHANGE
ONCE I'D BEEN THERE A
WHILE. MAYBE IT WOULDN'T.
I DIDN'T CARE.

I WAS
USED
TO IT.



I JUST DID MY JOB.
MR. GODFREY WANTED
PROMPTNESS, DILIGENCE
AND CIRCUMSPECTION?

HE'D
GET IT.



IT WAS A DIFFERENT
CROWD FROM THE
ONE AT BRUISER'S.



A VERY
DIFFERENT
CROWD.

I TRIED NOT TO STARE, BUT I
COULDN'T HELP BUT WONDER.
THESE SMILING MEN -- THESE
ATHLETIC WOMEN --



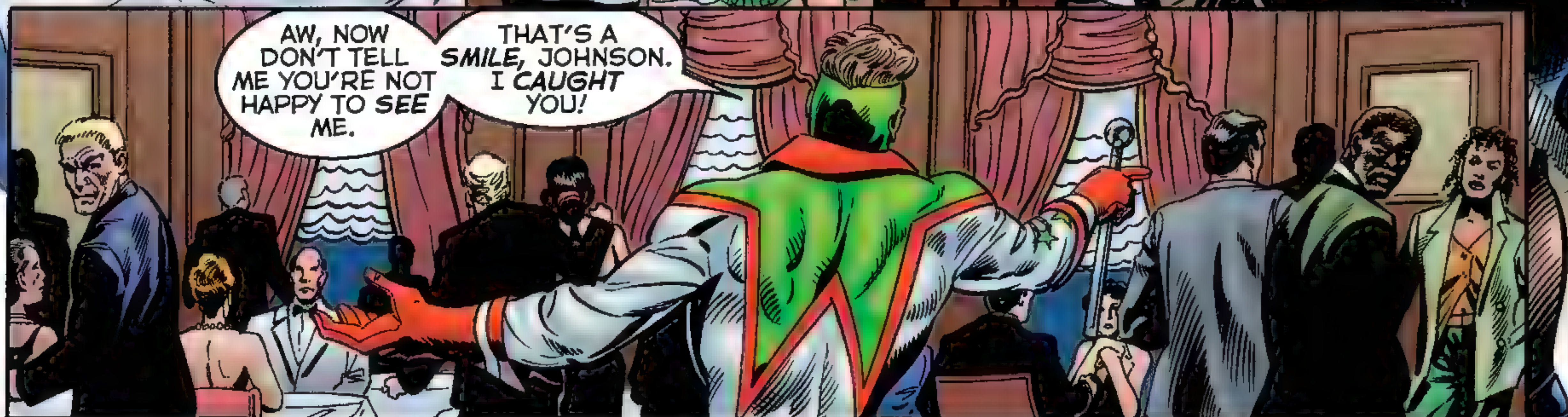
-- WERE THEY
REALLY --

HEY,
THERE, BOYS
AND GIRLS!
DON'T LOOK
NOW --



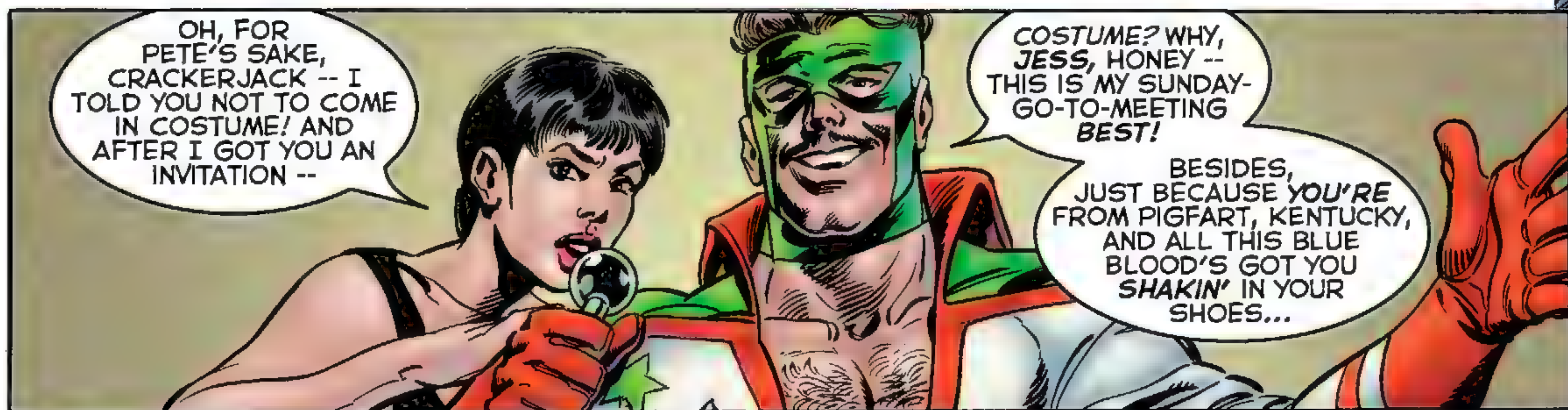
-- BUT THE
LIFE OF THE
PARTY'S JUST
ARRIVED!

NO
AUTOGRAPHS,
PLEASE. JUST
THROW
MONEY.



AW, NOW
DON'T TELL
ME YOU'RE NOT
HAPPY TO SEE
ME.

THAT'S A
SMILE, JOHNSON.
I CAUGHT
YOU!



OH, FOR
PETE'S SAKE,
CRACKERJACK -- I
TOLD YOU NOT TO COME
IN COSTUME! AND
AFTER I GOT YOU AN
INVITATION --

COSTUME? WHY,
JESS, HONEY --
THIS IS MY SUNDAY-
GO-TO-MEETING
BEST!

BESIDES,
JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE
FROM PIGFART, KENTUCKY,
AND ALL THIS BLUE
BLOOD'S GOT YOU
SHAKIN' IN YOUR
SHOES...



I AM NOT
SHAKING! JUST
BECAUSE I HAVE A
SENSE OF DECORUM
AND YOU --

-- OH, I DON'T
EVEN KNOW
WHY I BOTHER
WITH YOU!

IT'S THE
DIMPLES, RIGHT?
ADMIT IT -- IT'S THE
DIMPLES.

BY THE
WAY -- DID I
MENTION YOU
CLEAN UP REAL
NICE?

-- YEAH, YEAH,
I GUESS
THEY WERE.



I'D ONLY BEEN THERE
THREE DAYS, WHEN IT
HAPPENED. I WAS
HEADING BACK TO THE
KITCHEN AFTER CLEARING
SECTION FIVE --



-- WHEN --



EVERYBODY
REACTED SO
FAST --

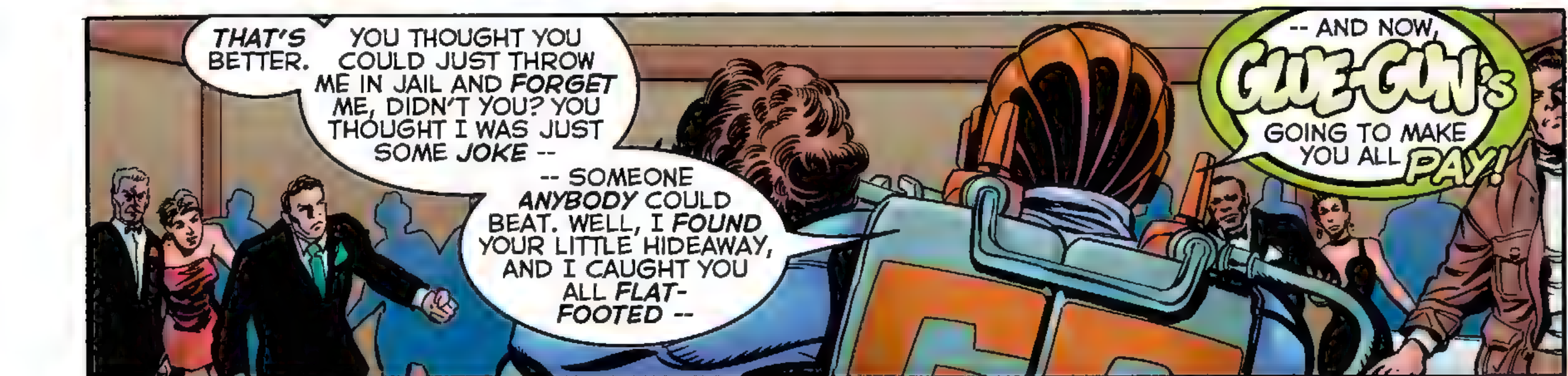


-- BUT --

FREEZE!

I MEAN IT!
ANYONE MOVES
A MUSCLE --

-- AND THE
KID HERE GETS
A SKULL FULL OF
EPOXY!



THAT'S
BETTER.

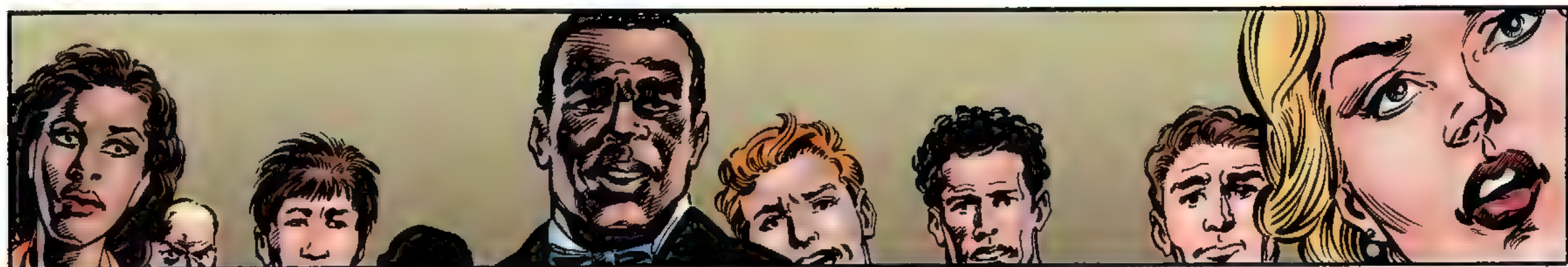
YOU THOUGHT YOU
COULD JUST THROW
ME IN JAIL AND FORGET
ME, DIDN'T YOU? YOU
THOUGHT I WAS JUST
SOME JOKE --

-- SOMEONE
ANYBODY COULD
BEAT. WELL, I FOUND
YOUR LITTLE HIDEAWAY,
AND I CAUGHT YOU
ALL FLAT-
FOOTED --

-- AND NOW,
GLUE-GUN'S
GOING TO MAKE
YOU ALL **PAY!**



-- AND --



AT FIRST, I FELT HUMILIATED,
EMBARRASSED BY THE
LAUGHTER. I FELT LIKE I'D
DONE THE WRONG THING,
OVERREACTIONED SOMEHOW --

-- UNTIL --

SEE
THAT?

ONE
KICK

WAKES
UP, HE'LL
BE SO

A LOSER,
ALWAYS A
LOSER

LED HIM
HERE?

HAD TO BE
CRACKERJACK

KID
MOVED

NO
HESITATION

SAW THE
OPENING

COLD
LINGUINI,
RIGHT IN
THE

COULDN'T
HAVE DONE THAT
AT THAT AGE

-- I REALIZED
THEY WEREN'T
LAUGHING
AT ME.

THEY ACTUALLY
THOUGHT I
DID GOOD.

I TRIED TO
HIDE MY SMILE BY
STAYING BUSY --

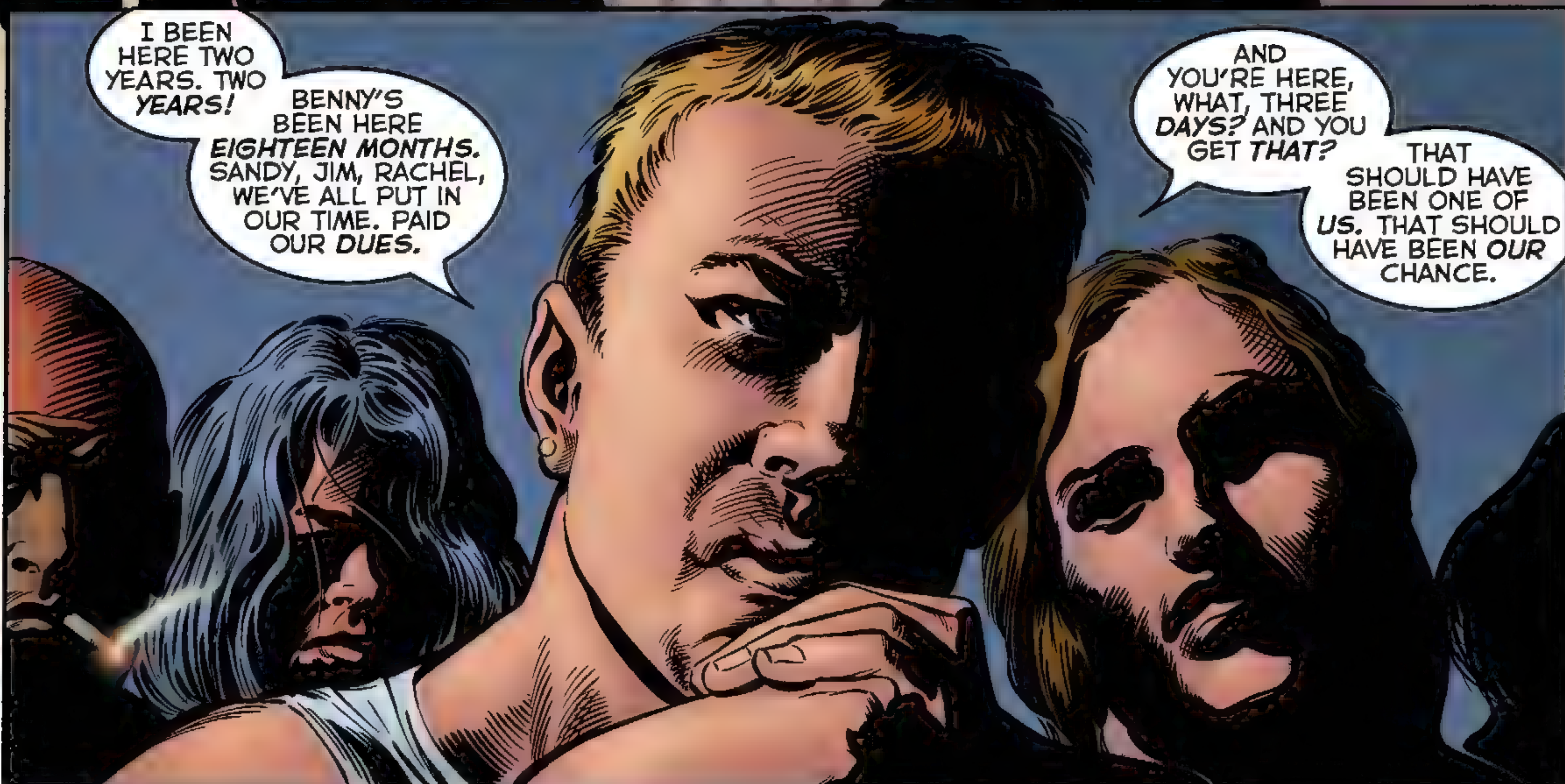
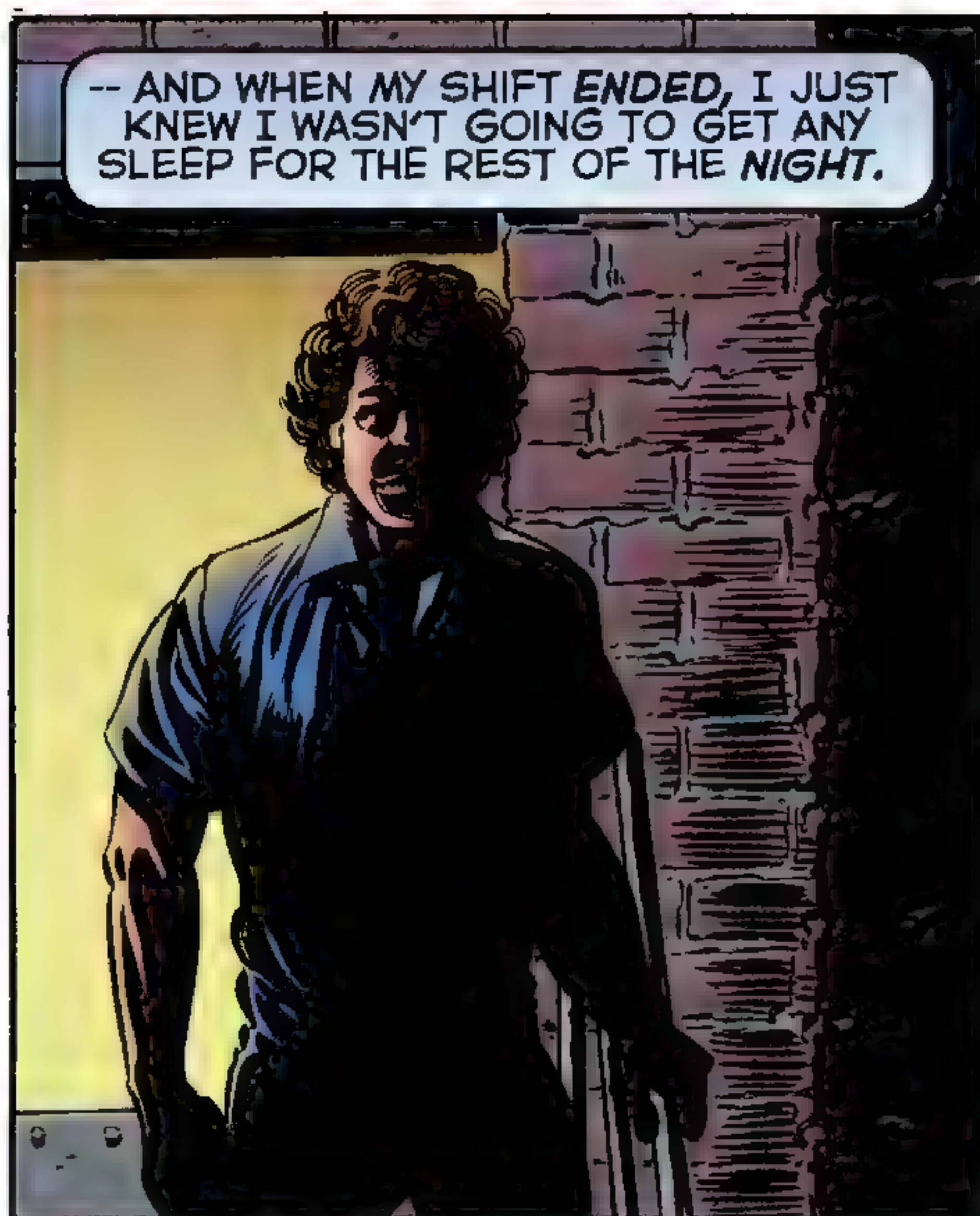
I'LL
JUST GET
THESE --

WHY
DON'T YOU
LEAVE
THOSE --

-- LET SOMEONE
ELSE CLEAN UP?
YOU'VE EARNED
IT.

NICE
JOB THERE,
KID. YOU'LL
GO FAR.

I WAS FLOATING
ON THAT THE REST
OF THE NIGHT --





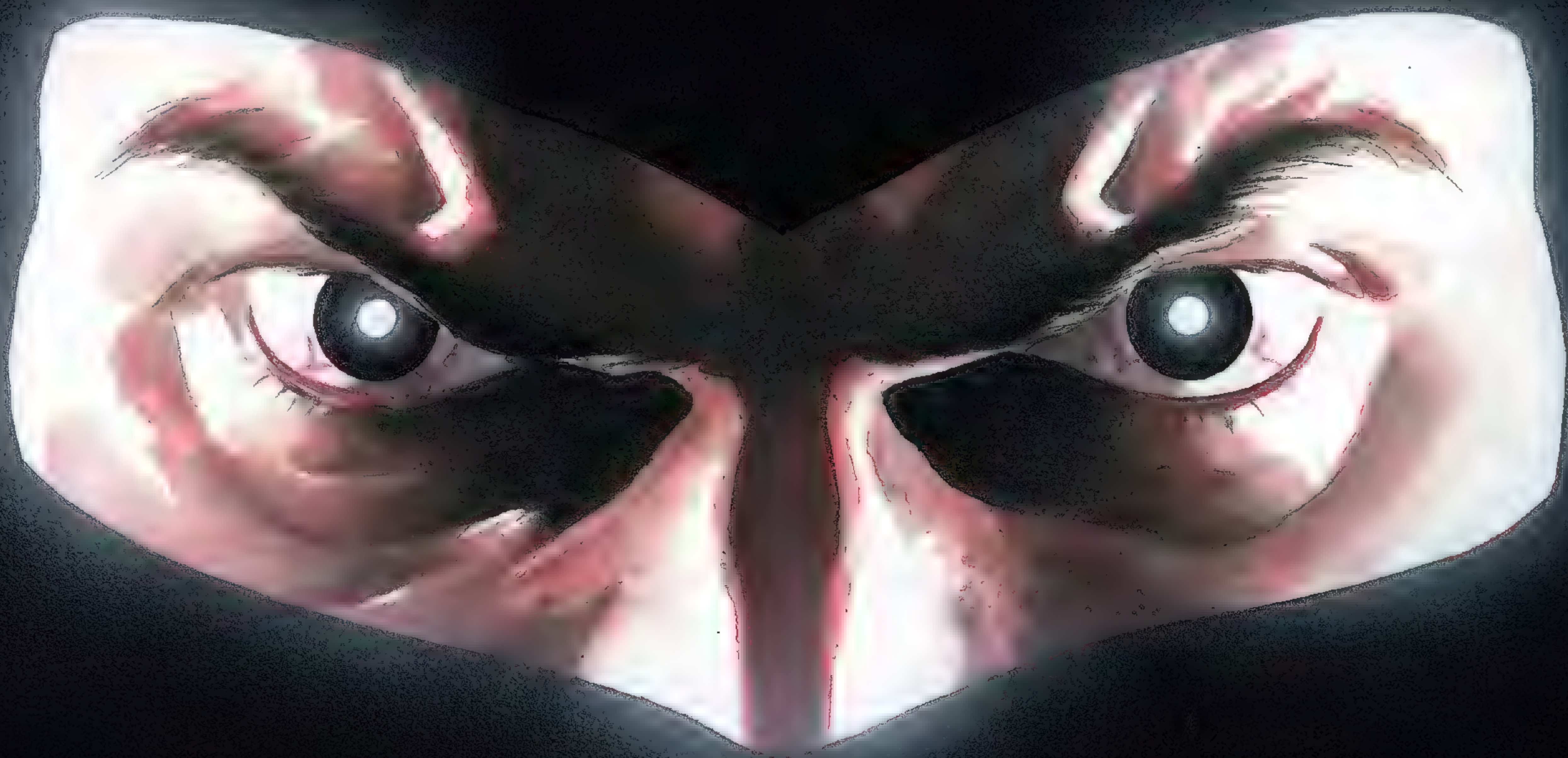
I'D
LIKE TO
TALK WITH
THE YOUNG
MAN.

PRIVATELY.

TO BE
CONTINUED

ASTRO CITY
DEPT. OF PUBLIC
WORKS





MY DAD USED TO SAY
APPRENTICESHIPS
WERE A GOOD IDEA.

PEOPLE SHOULD LEARN BY
DOING, HE SAID -- BY SEEING
HOW IT WAS DONE, GETTING
THEIR HANDS DIRTY --

-- INSTEAD OF SITTING
IN A CLASSROOM AND
GETTING PUMPED FULL OF
RULES AND FACTS AND
FORMULAS, WITH NO FEEL
FOR HOW THEY WORKED
IN THE REAL WORLD.

WHA--?!

TH-THE
CONFESSOR--!

I THINK
HE HAD A
POINT.

LEARNING THE GAME



MY DAD USED TO SAY A LOT OF THINGS, THOUGH. I USED TO THINK HE WAS THE SMARTEST MAN IN THE WORLD.

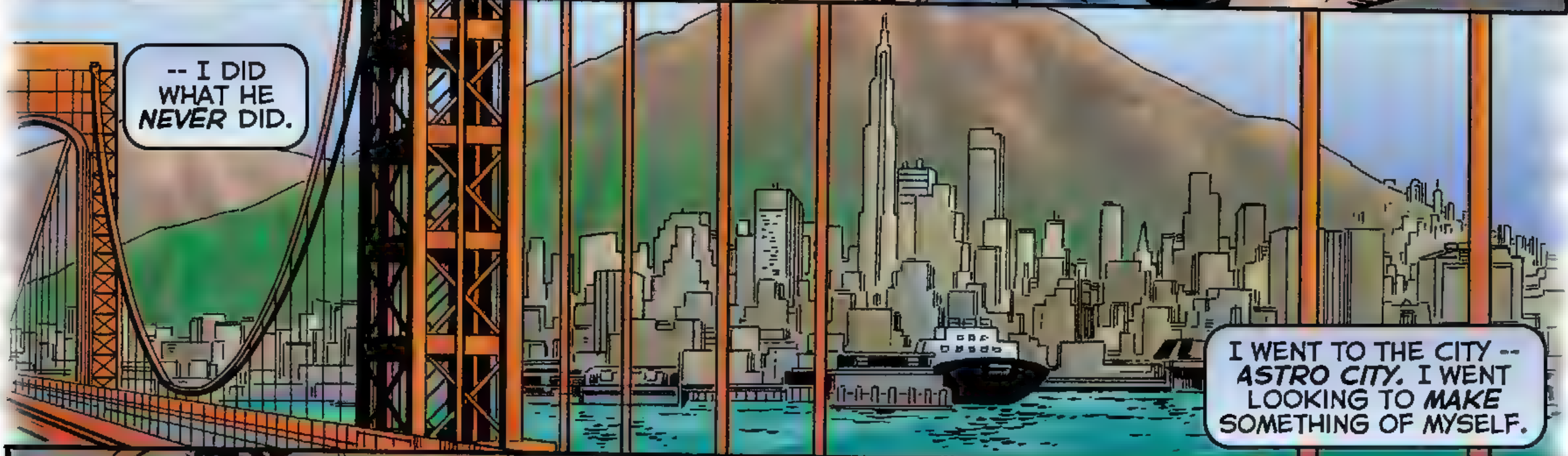
BUT HE DIED, IN A SMALL TOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE, SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE WHO USED HIM AND BELITTLED HIM --



AND ME --

WHACK

UHH!



-- I DID WHAT HE NEVER DID.

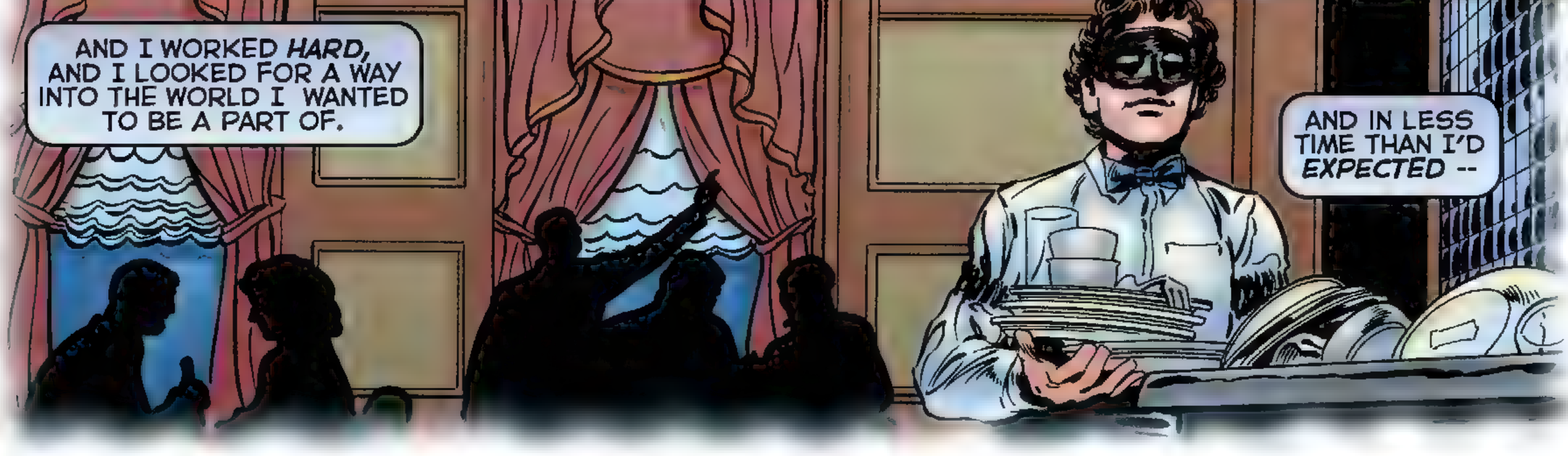
I WENT TO THE CITY -- ASTRO CITY. I WENT LOOKING TO MAKE SOMETHING OF MYSELF.



GET HI--

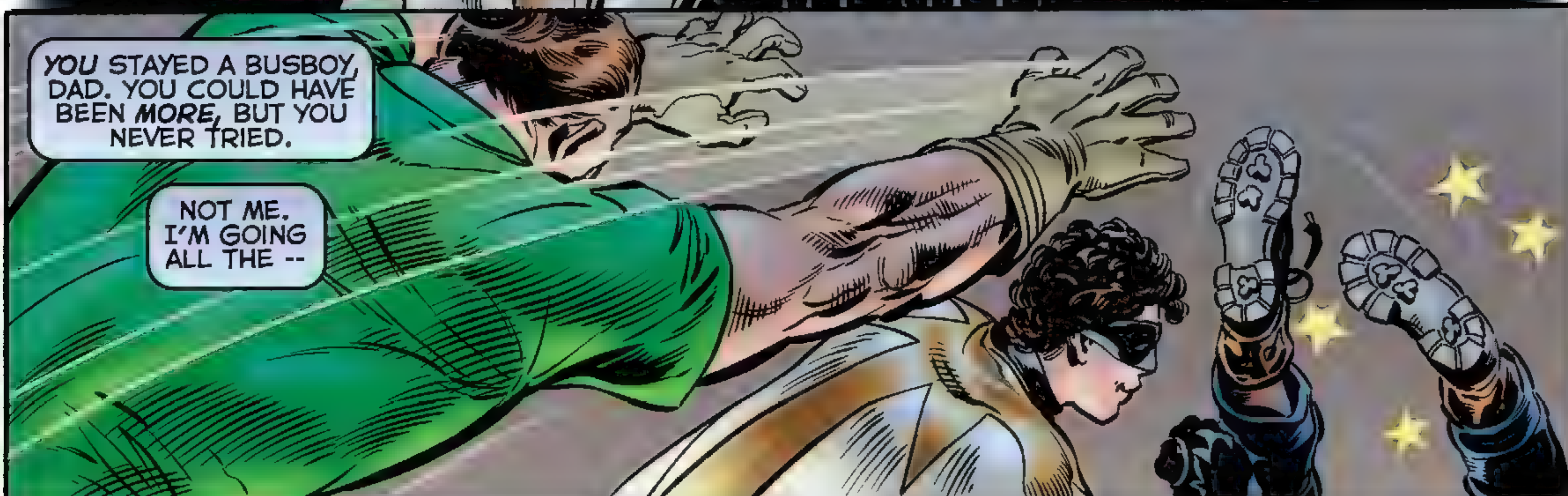
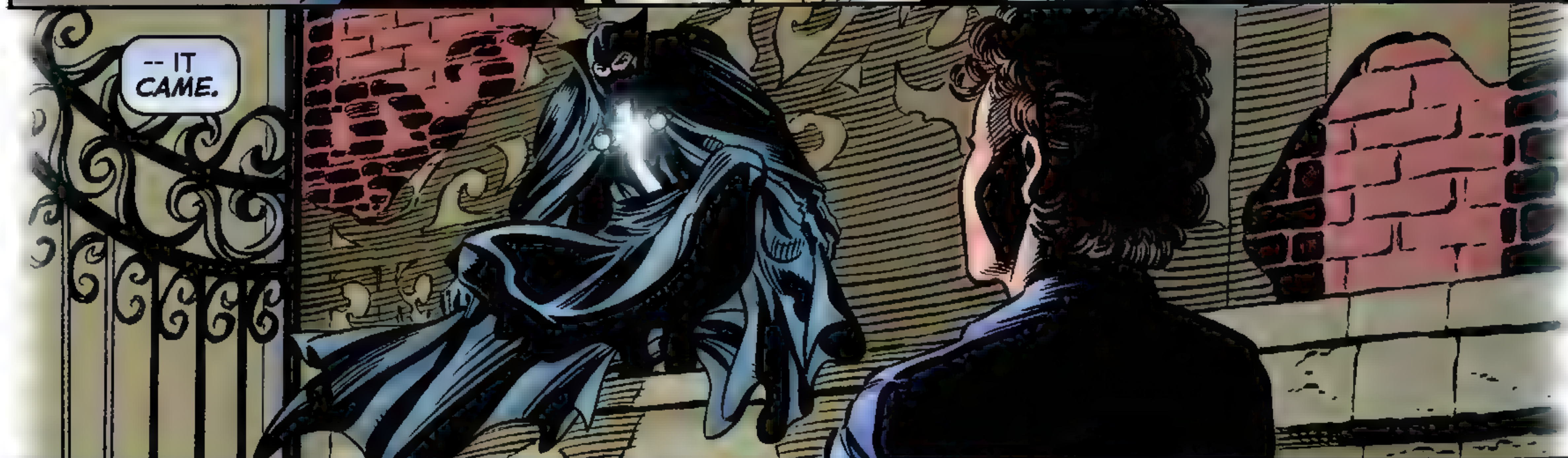
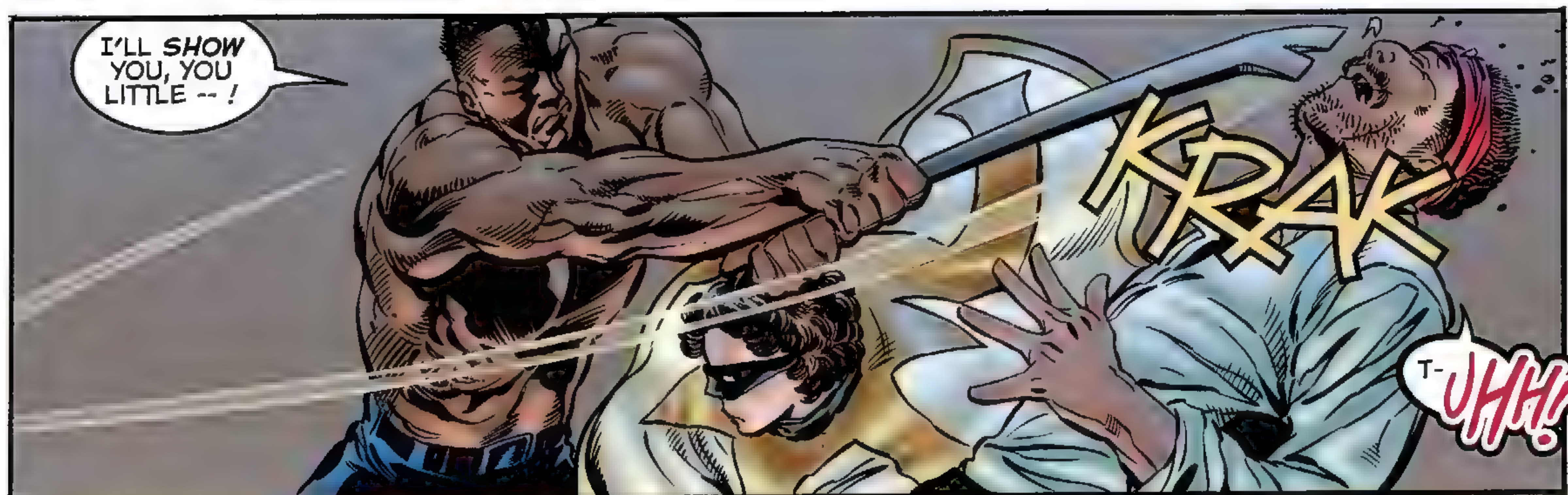
KRAK

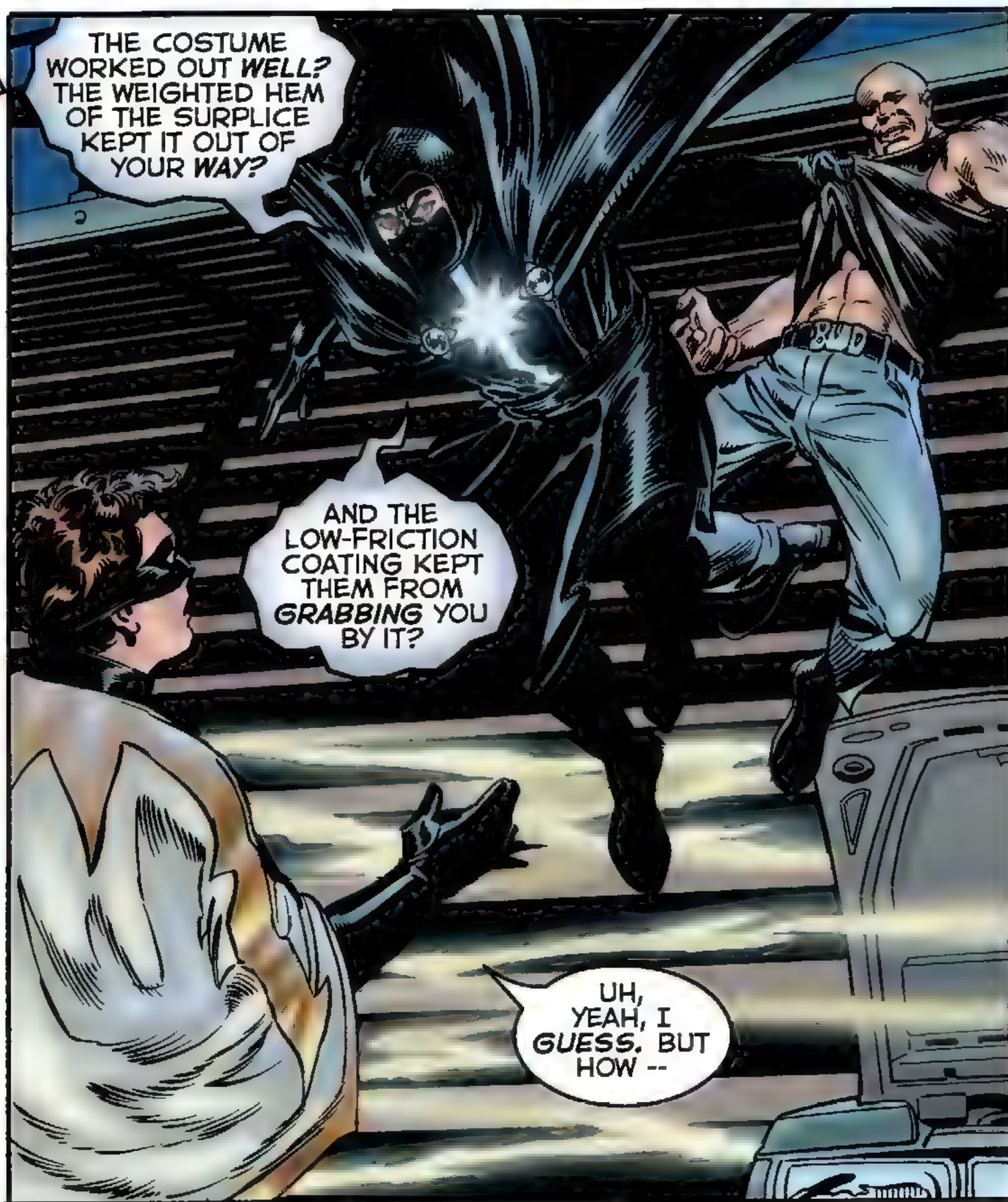
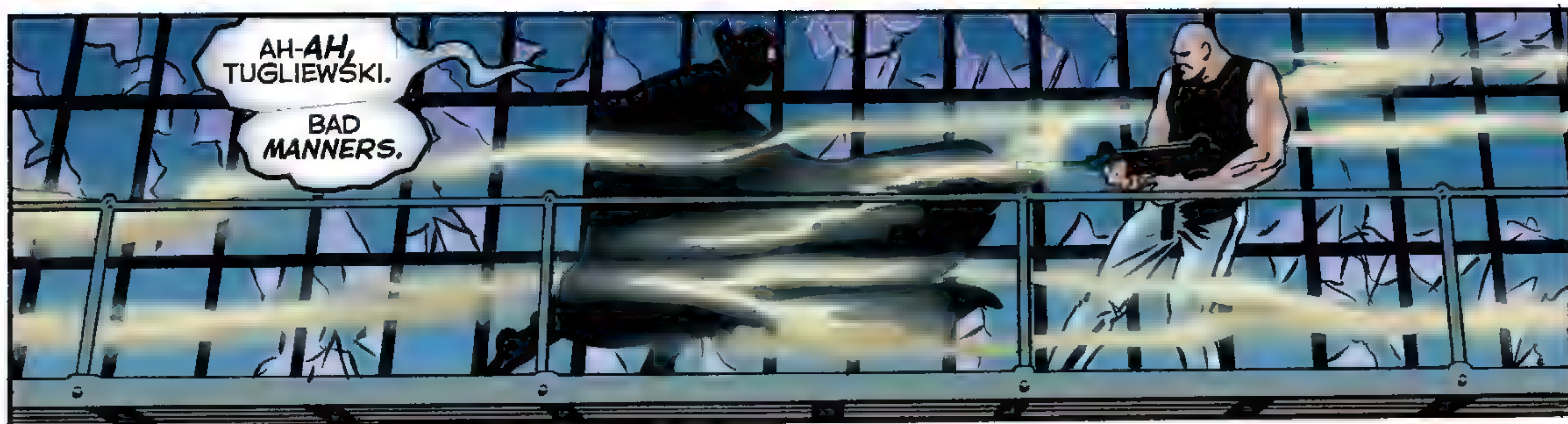
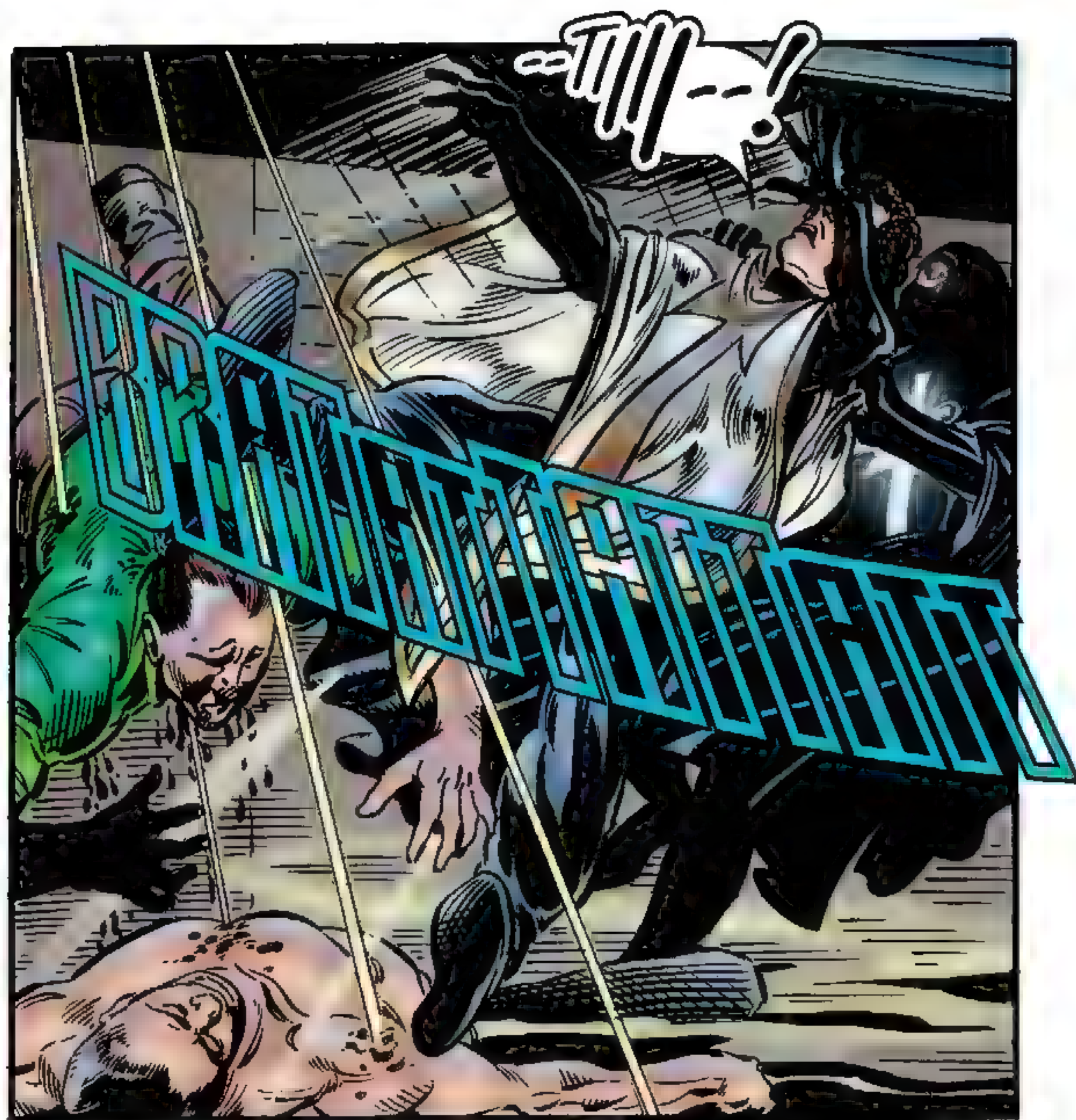
HAKHH!



AND I WORKED HARD, AND I LOOKED FOR A WAY INTO THE WORLD I WANTED TO BE A PART OF.

AND IN LESS TIME THAN I'D EXPECTED --







GOOD.

NOW LET'S
SEE WHAT MR.
TUGLIEWSKI HAS
TO SAY FOR
HIMSELF.

I AIN'T TELLIN'
YOU SQUAT,
PRIEST-O!



OH, I THINK YOU'LL
TELL ME MUCH MORE
THAN *THAT*, ANDY. IT
IS ANDY, ISN'T
IT?

THIS IS
A VERY CLEAN,
VERY EFFICIENT
CARJACKING OPERATION.
BUT YOU'VE BEEN
KILLING *DRIVERS*,
AND WE CAN'T
HAVE THAT.

YOU'RE NOT
SMART ENOUGH
TO SET THIS UP
YOURSELF, ANDY.
AND IT'S HOT. IT'S
BEEN HOT ALL WEEK,
AND I DON'T
HAVE MUCH
PATIENCE.

SO LOOK AT
ME, AND THINK
ABOUT WHETHER
YOU REALLY DON'T
WANT TO TALK. WHO'S
BACKING YOU? WHO'S
PULLING YOUR
STRINGS?



I DIDN'T KNOW *HOW* HE
DID IT. IT HAD TO BE IN
THE LOOK HE GAVE THEM.



I'D HAVE SWORN THE
GUY WAS TOO TOUGH TO
SAY ANYTHING -- BUT --

OKAY,
OKAY!

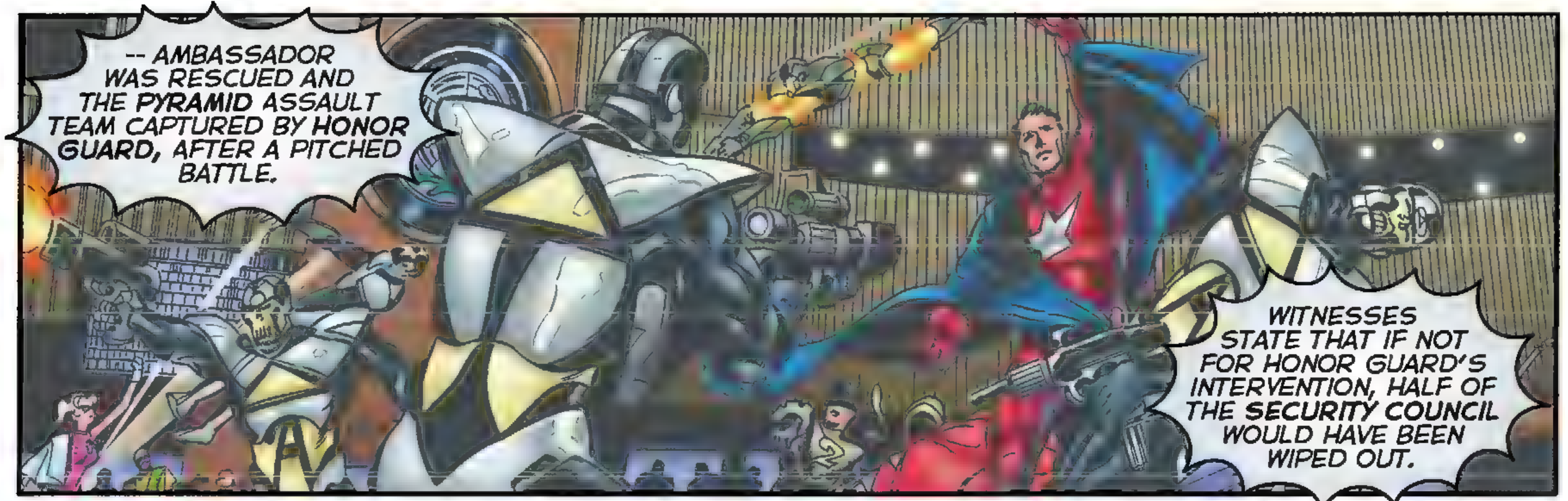


I DON'T KNOW THE
GUY'S NAME, BUT HE
WORKS FOR THE
DEACON, I
THINK.

WE MEET ON
THURSDAY
NIGHTS, IN A
LITTLE DIVE ON
GIBSON...



I HAD TO LEARN
HOW HE *DID* THAT.



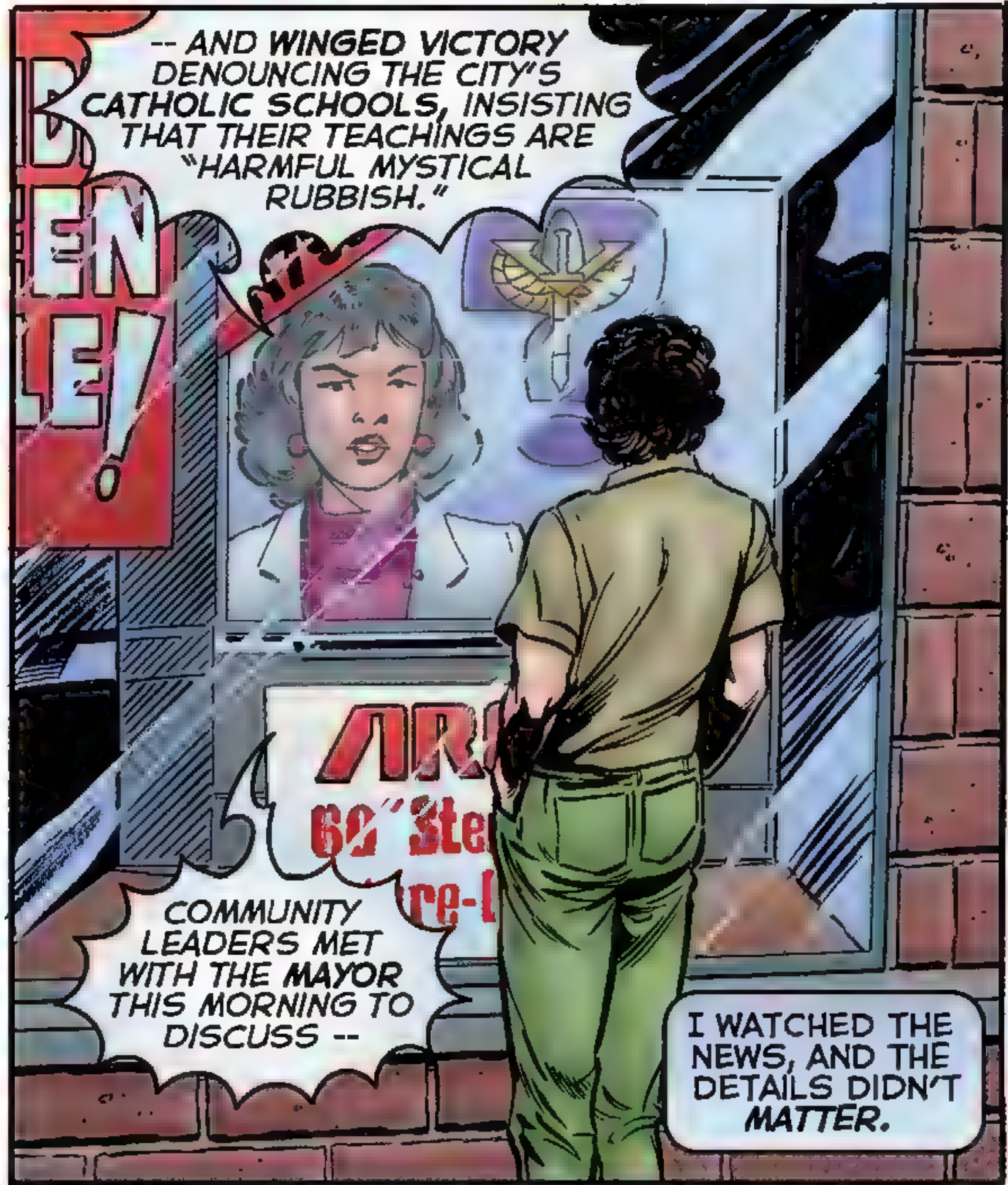
-- AMBASSADOR WAS RESCUED AND THE PYRAMID ASSAULT TEAM CAPTURED BY HONOR GUARD, AFTER A PITCHED BATTLE.

WITNESSES STATE THAT IF NOT FOR HONOR GUARD'S INTERVENTION, HALF OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL WOULD HAVE BEEN WIPED OUT.



BUT LOCALLY, SUPERHERO APPROVAL RATINGS HAVE TAKEN A DIP --

-- AMID REPORTS OF CRACKERJACK ROBBING THE FASS GARDENS BRANCH OF ASTROBANK --



-- AND WINGED VICTORY DENOUNCING THE CITY'S CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, INSISTING THAT THEIR TEACHINGS ARE "HARMFUL MYSTICAL RUBBISH."

COMMUNITY LEADERS MET WITH THE MAYOR THIS MORNING TO DISCUSS --

I WATCHED THE NEWS, AND THE DETAILS DIDN'T MATTER.



THERE WAS ALWAYS A HERO OR TWO ON THE OUTS WITH THE PUBLIC, AND IT USUALLY TURNED OUT TO BE NOTHING.

WHAT WAS IMPORTANT -- AT LEAST TO ME -- WAS THAT I LOOKED AT THOSE IMAGES AND I THOUGHT OF THEM AS "US."



I WAS ONE OF THEM.

I HAD A SECRET FROM THE PEOPLE AROUND ME. I WAS SOMETHING SPECIAL.

AND I COULDN'T RESIST --



-- I STROLLED
ON OVER TO TAKE
A LOOK AT IT.

GRANDENETTI CATHEDRAL.
AN ABBEY, REALLY, WITH
THE CATHEDRAL AT ITS
CENTER.

CARDINAL ENZIO
GRANDENETTI STARTED
BUILDING IT IN 1869, AND
IT WAS STILL UNFINISHED
WHEN HE DIED IN 1908.
HE WANTED TO GLORIFY
GOD ON EARTH, AND IT
WAS NEVER ENOUGH --

-- SO HE KEPT
ADDING TO IT,
EXTENDING IT,
BUYING MORE
LAND, BUILDING
CHAPELS AND
CLOISTERS AND
CATACOMBS --

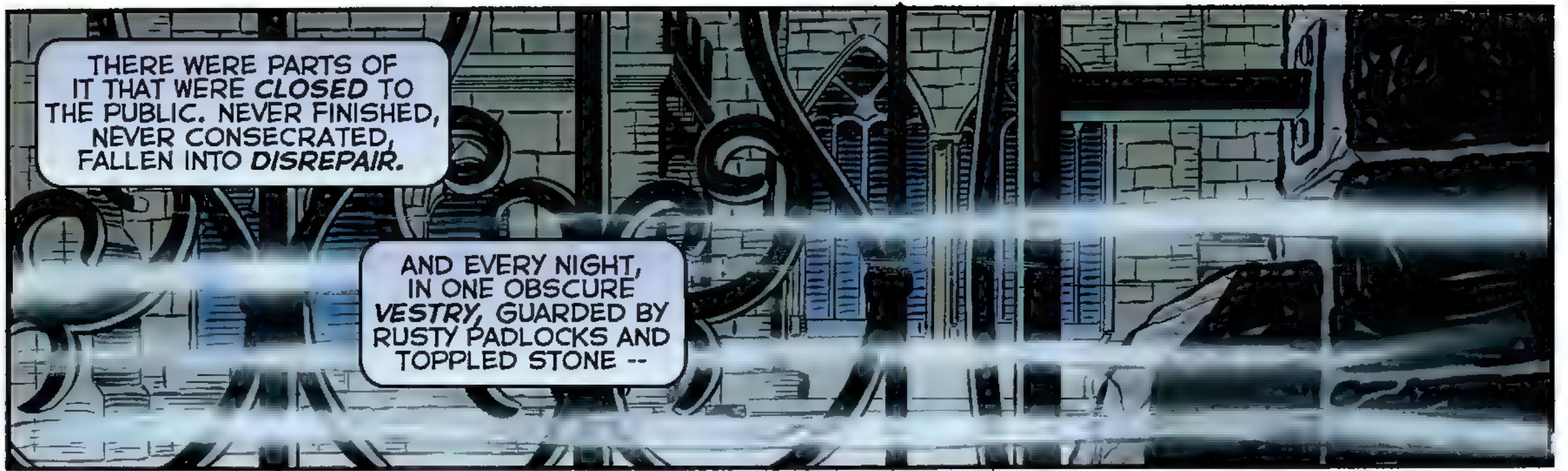
-- UNTIL HE'D CREATED
A MAZE OF INTERLOCKING
BUILDINGS AND PATHWAYS
AND COURTYARDS, SPRAWLING
OVER -- AND UNDER --
FOURTEEN CITY BLOCKS.

"A CHARMING AND
EDUCATIONAL SITE FOR
A SUNNY AFTERNOON'S
EXPLORING," THE
GUIDEBOOKS CALLED IT.

BUT THAT
WAS BY DAY.
BY NIGHT --



-- BY NIGHT IT
WAS SOMETHING
ELSE AGAIN.



THERE WERE PARTS OF IT THAT WERE **CLOSED** TO THE PUBLIC. NEVER FINISHED, NEVER CONSECRATED, FALLEN INTO **DISREPAIR**.

AND EVERY NIGHT, IN ONE OBSCURE **VESTRY**, GUARDED BY RUSTY PADLOCKS AND TOPPLED STONE --



-- I UNDERWENT MY **TRAINING**.

NO. IT IS NOT ENOUGH TO MERELY **PARRY** THE BLOW. YOU MUST ALSO SET YOUR OPPONENT UP FOR THE **COUNTER-STRIKE...**



SEAN HANRAHAN. THE ORIGINAL QUEEN'S BISHOP IN THE **CHESSMEN**, LATER ONE OF **HEADSTONE'S** LIEUTENANTS. WENT AWAY IN '87 FOR RACKETEERING, KIDNAPPING AND CONSPIRACY TO COMMIT. PAROLED IN APRIL '92.



GOOD. NOW LET'S SEE YOU **RUN** THEM, SEE IF YOU CAN FIND A **MATCH**.

RULES AND FACTS AND FORMULAS, OVER AND OVER. EXCEPT **SOME NIGHTS** -- MAYBE THREE OR FOUR TIMES A WEEK --



ENOUGH **STUDY**. LET'S GO OUT.

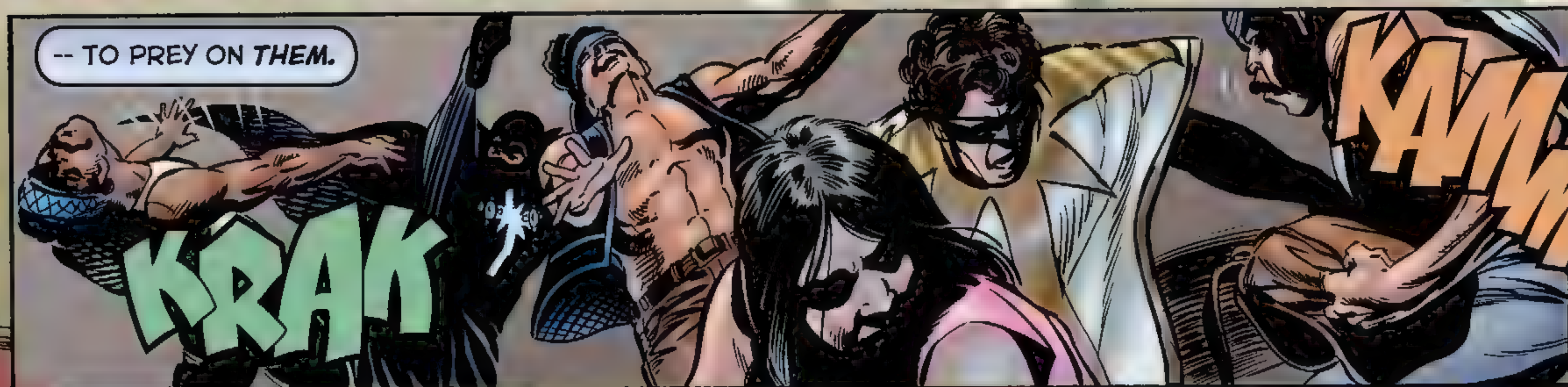
-- SOME NIGHTS WE WENT OUT AND MADE IT **REAL**.



PREDATORS,
THE CONFESSOR
CALLED THEM.

AND IT
WAS OUR
JOB --

PREYING ON
INNOCENTS -- BLEEDING
AWAY THEIR LIVES, THEIR
MONEY, THEIR SAFETY.

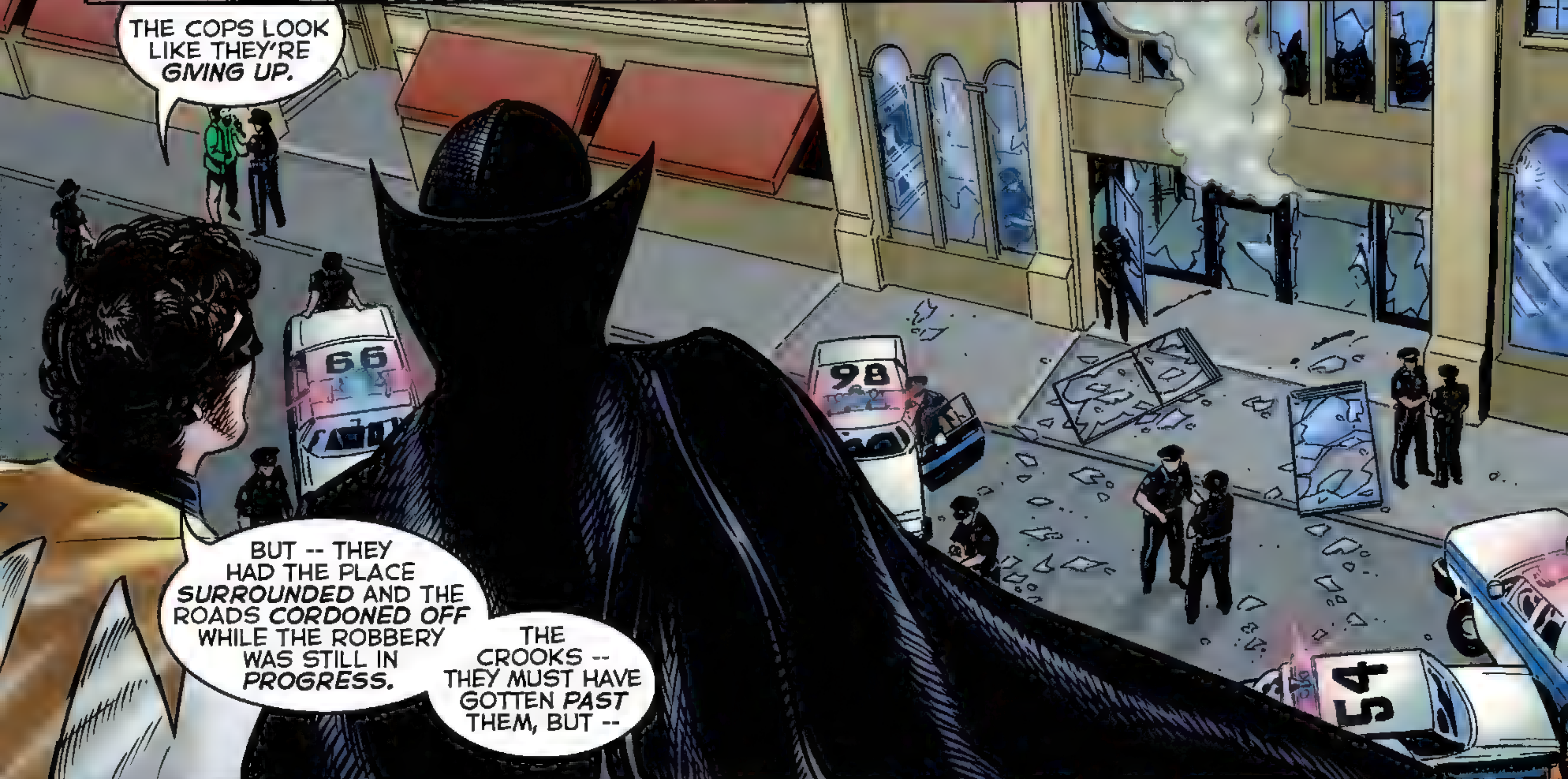


-- TO PREY ON THEM.

KRAK

KAMM

THE COPS LOOK
LIKE THEY'RE
GIVING UP.



BUT -- THEY
HAD THE PLACE
SURROUNDED AND THE
ROADS CORDONED OFF
WHILE THE ROBBERY
WAS STILL IN
PROGRESS.

THE
CROOKS --
THEY MUST HAVE
GOTTEN PAST
THEM, BUT --

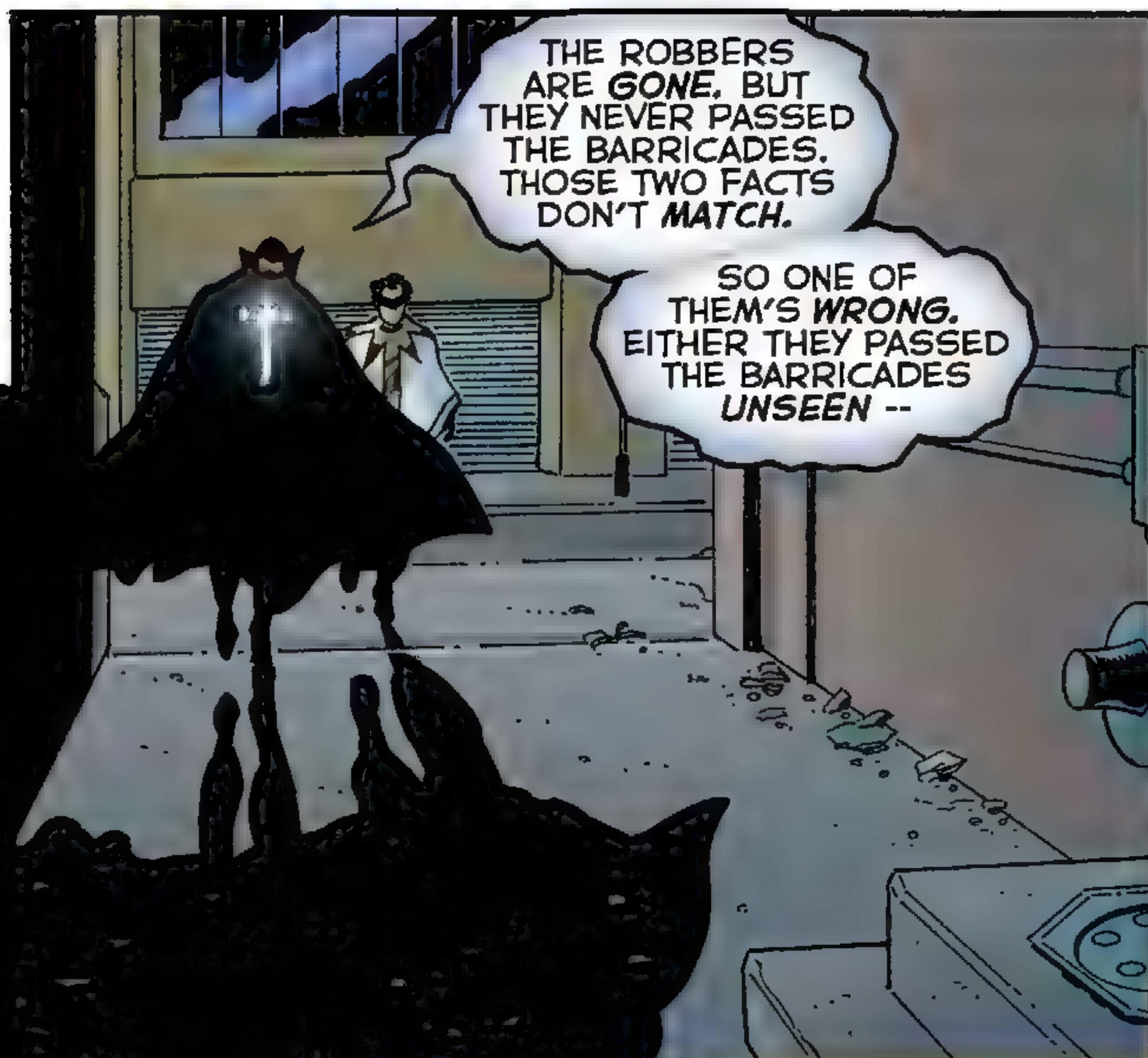


NEVER
ASSUME.



LOOK AT
THE FACTS, LOOK
AT THE PATTERNS --
AND LOOK FOR
WHAT DOESN'T
FIT.

BASE YOUR
DEDUCTIONS
ON THAT.

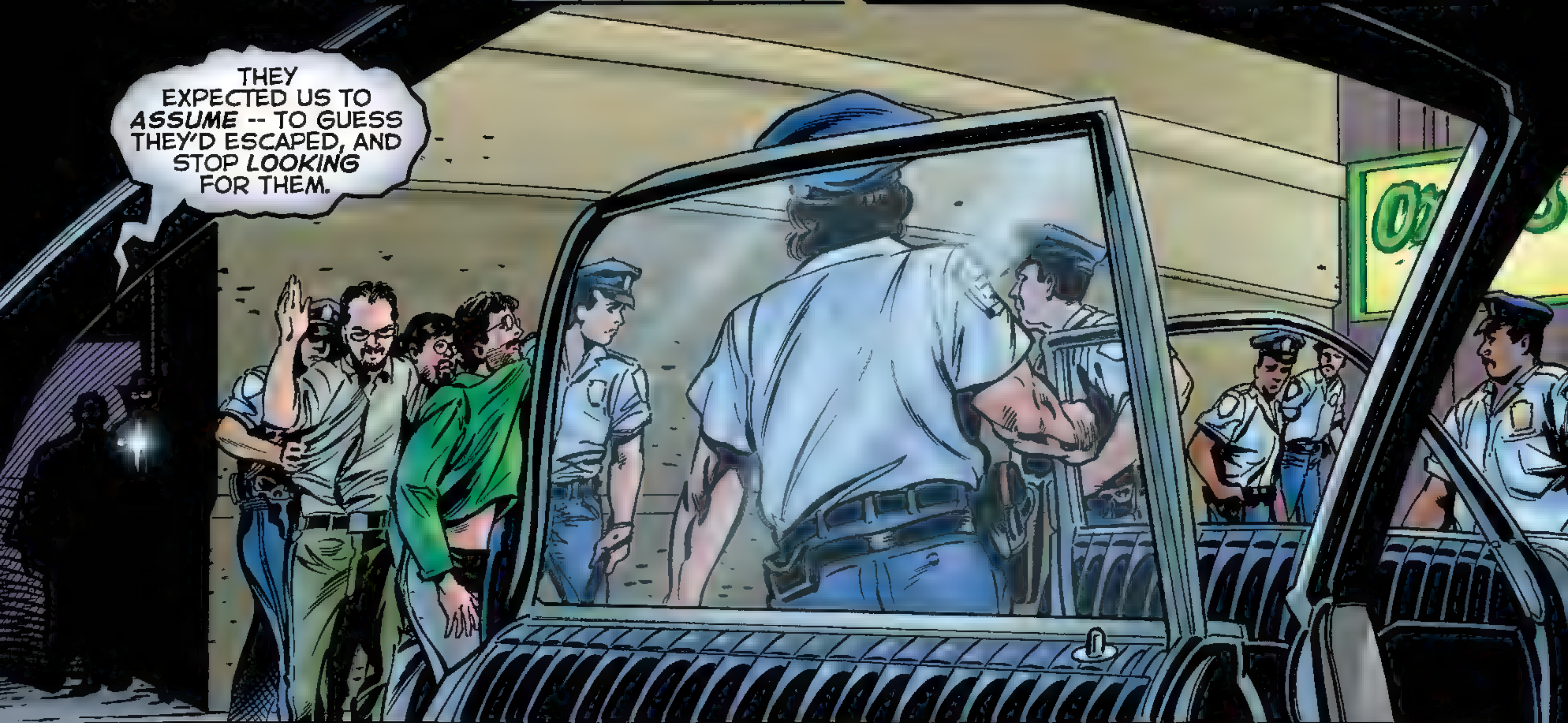


THE ROBBERS
ARE GONE, BUT
THEY NEVER PASSED
THE BARRICADES.
THOSE TWO FACTS
DON'T MATCH.

SO ONE OF
THEM'S *WRONG*.
EITHER THEY PASSED
THE BARRICADES
UNSEEN --



-- OR
THEY'RE STILL
HERE.



THEY
EXPECTED US TO
ASSUME -- TO GUESS
THEY'D ESCAPED, AND
STOP LOOKING
FOR THEM.



AND ONCE WE'D GONE,
THEY COULD CREEP
OUT -- AND MAKE THEIR
GETAWAY WITH NOBODY
LOOKING IN THE
RIGHT PLACE.

I GUESS
I'VE ~~ENF~~ GOT
A LOT TO LEARN,
CONFESSOR.

CONFESSOR?
→

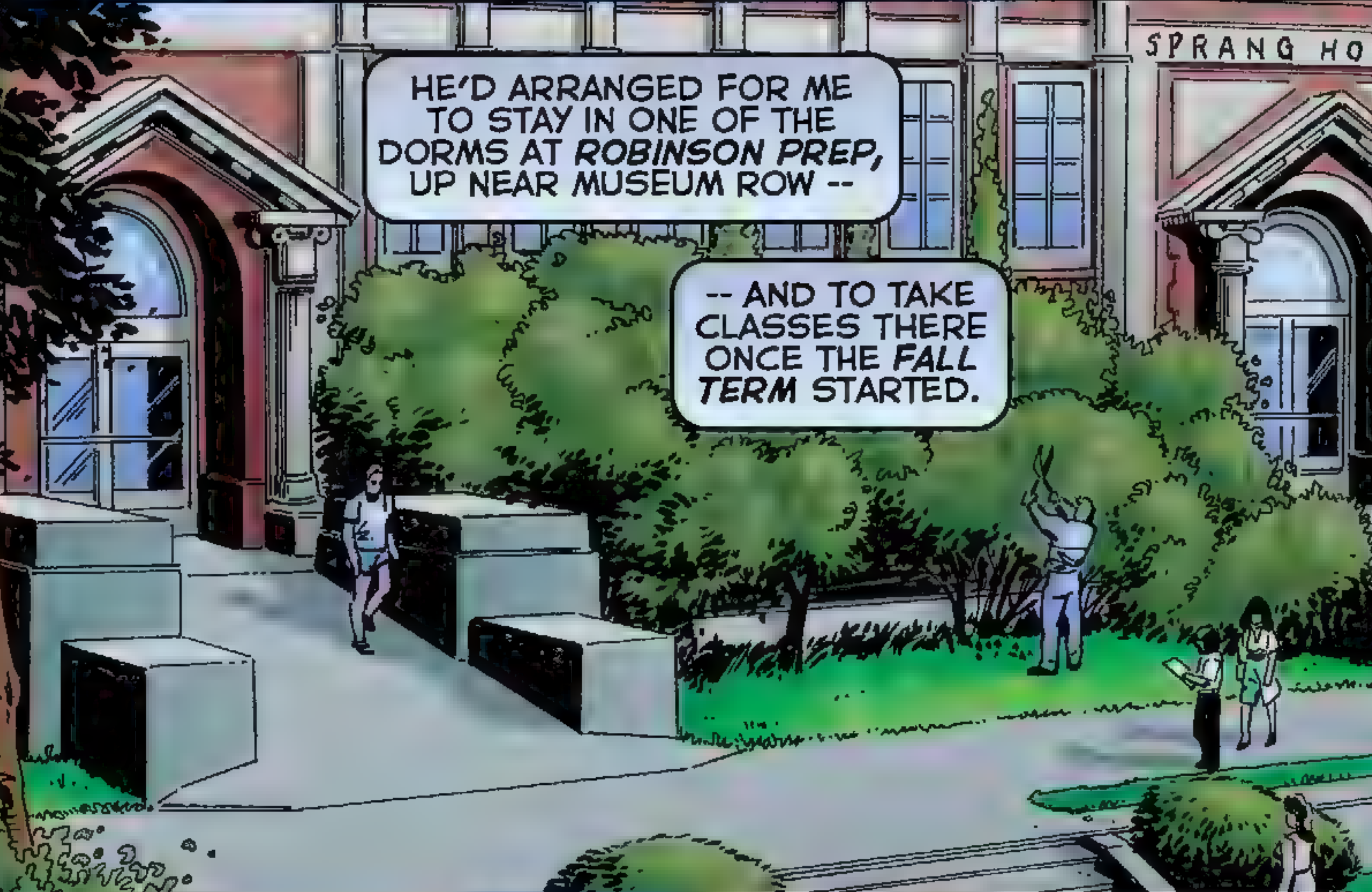


AT EVERY TURN, HE
MADE ME FEEL LIKE
AN IDIOT --



-- BUT AT LEAST I FELT LIKE AN IDIOT WITH **POTENTIAL**.

AFTER ALL, HE DIDN'T HAVE TO TRAIN ME.



HE'D ARRANGED FOR ME TO STAY IN ONE OF THE DORMS AT **ROBINSON PREP**, UP NEAR MUSEUM ROW --

-- AND TO TAKE CLASSES THERE ONCE THE **FALL TERM** STARTED.

HE DIDN'T HAVE TO DO ANY OF THAT --



-- NOT UNLESS HE THOUGHT IT WAS WORTH DOING.

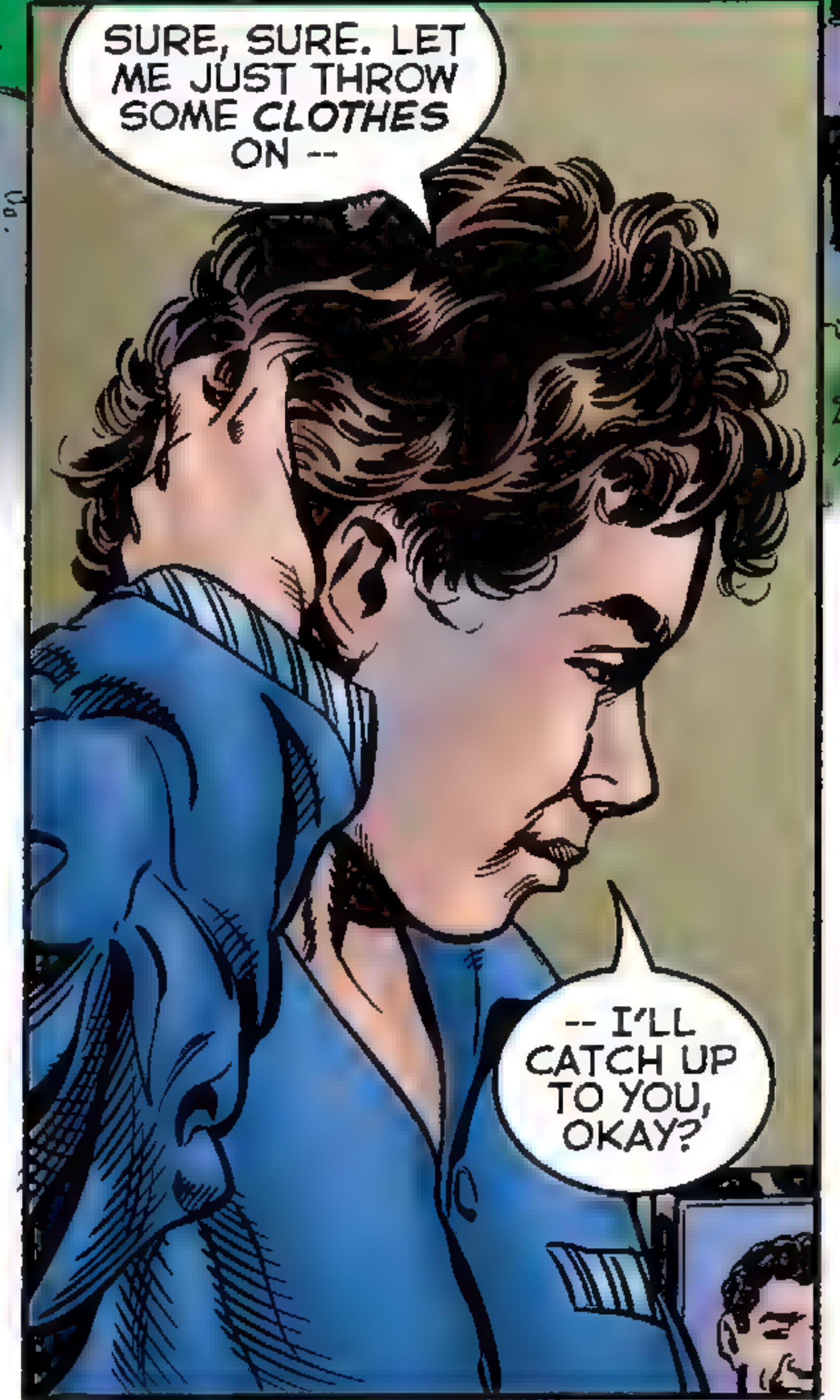
HEY, **KINNEY**! IT'S TWO IN THE AFTERNOON -- YOU GONNA SLEEP THE WHOLE DAY AWAY?

HUH?



OH, HI, **CHET**. 'SUP?

WE'RE HEADED DOWN TO **MOONEY'S** FOR A SLICE. YOU UP TO COME WITH?



SURE, SURE. LET ME JUST THROW SOME CLOTHES ON --

-- I'LL CATCH UP TO YOU, OKAY?



I COULDN'T HELP BUT **WONDER** -- I NEVER SAW THE CONFESSOR DURING THE DAY. HE HADN'T TOLD ME WHO HE REALLY WAS, AND I HADN'T ASKED -- BUT --

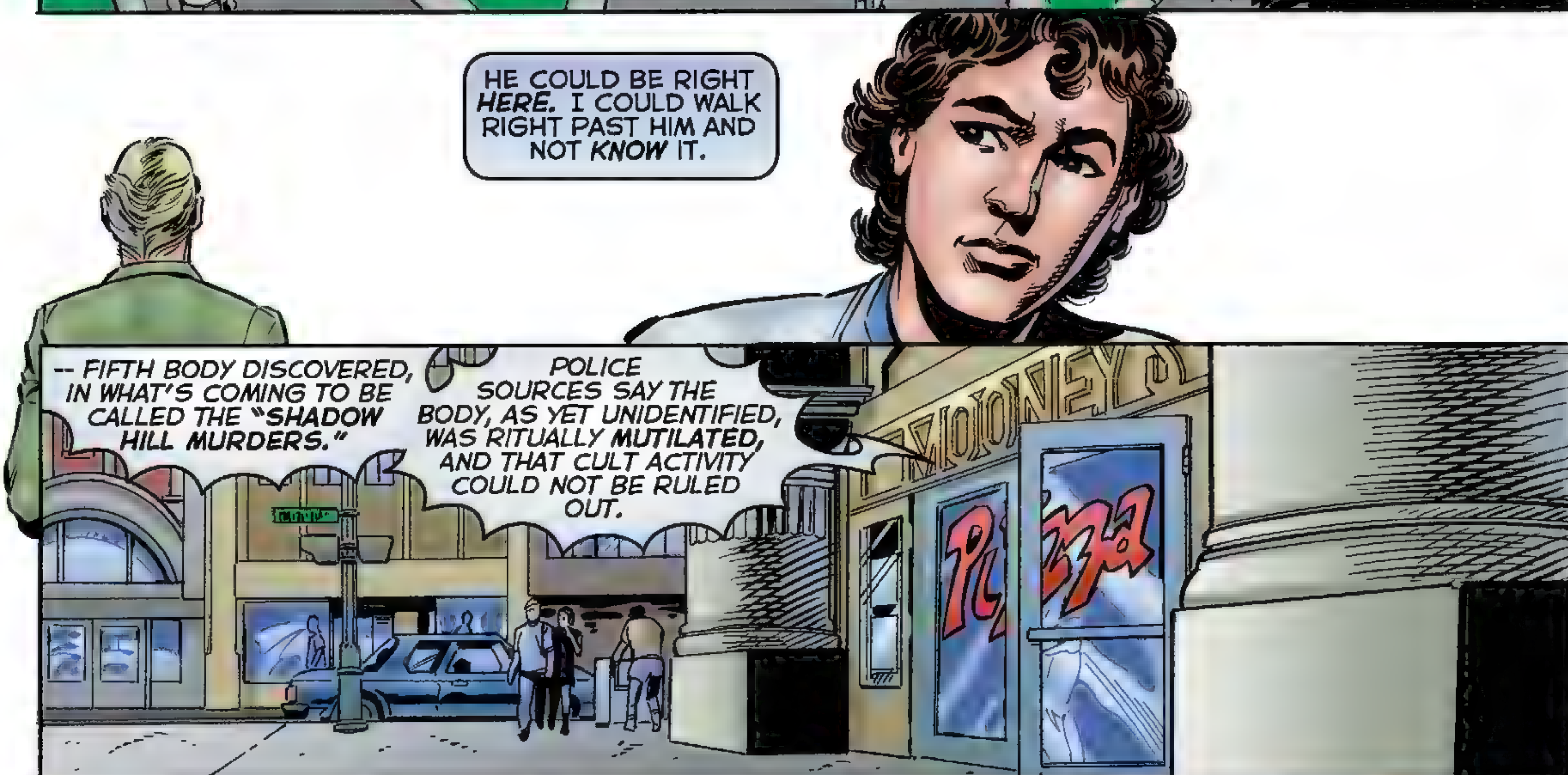
-- WAS HE AROUND? WAS HE... SOMEWHERE **HERE**?



EVEN DURING SUMMER BREAK,
ROBINSON HAD LOTS OF
ADULTS AROUND --

-- PROFESSORS
GETTING READY
FOR NEXT TERM,
ADMINISTRATORS,
GROUNDSMEN --

-- AND THE
CONFESSOR HAD
A SCHOLARLY
MANNER --



HE COULD BE RIGHT
HERE. I COULD WALK
RIGHT PAST HIM AND
NOT KNOW IT.

-- FIFTH BODY DISCOVERED,
IN WHAT'S COMING TO BE
CALLED THE "SHADOW
HILL MURDERS."

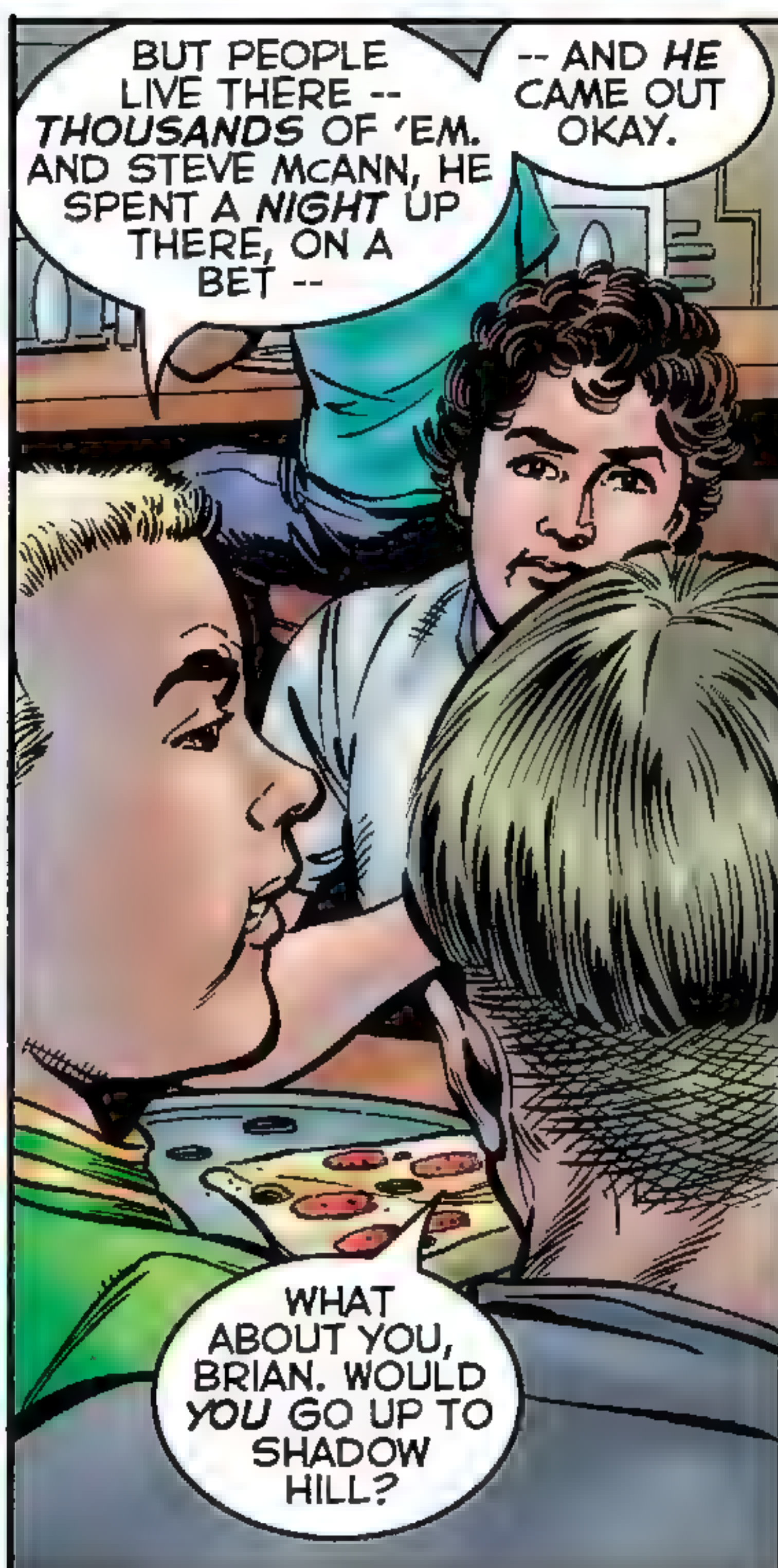
POLICE
SOURCES SAY THE
BODY, AS YET UNIDENTIFIED,
WAS RITUALLY MUTILATED,
AND THAT CULT ACTIVITY
COULD NOT BE RULED
OUT.



IN OTHER NEWS, THE
ADVENTURER CALLED
CRACKERJACK WAS
AGAIN THE SUBJECT OF
CRIMINAL ALLEGATIONS
TODAY, AS --

GEEZ --
MUTILATED!
CAN YOU
BELIEVE
IT?

ALL THAT
ABOUT MONSTERS
AND MAGIC AND
STUFF -- I WOULDN'T
GO UP TO SHADOW
HILL IF YOU
PAID ME!



BUT PEOPLE
LIVE THERE --
THOUSANDS OF 'EM.
AND STEVE MCANN, HE
SPENT A NIGHT UP
THERE, ON A
BET --

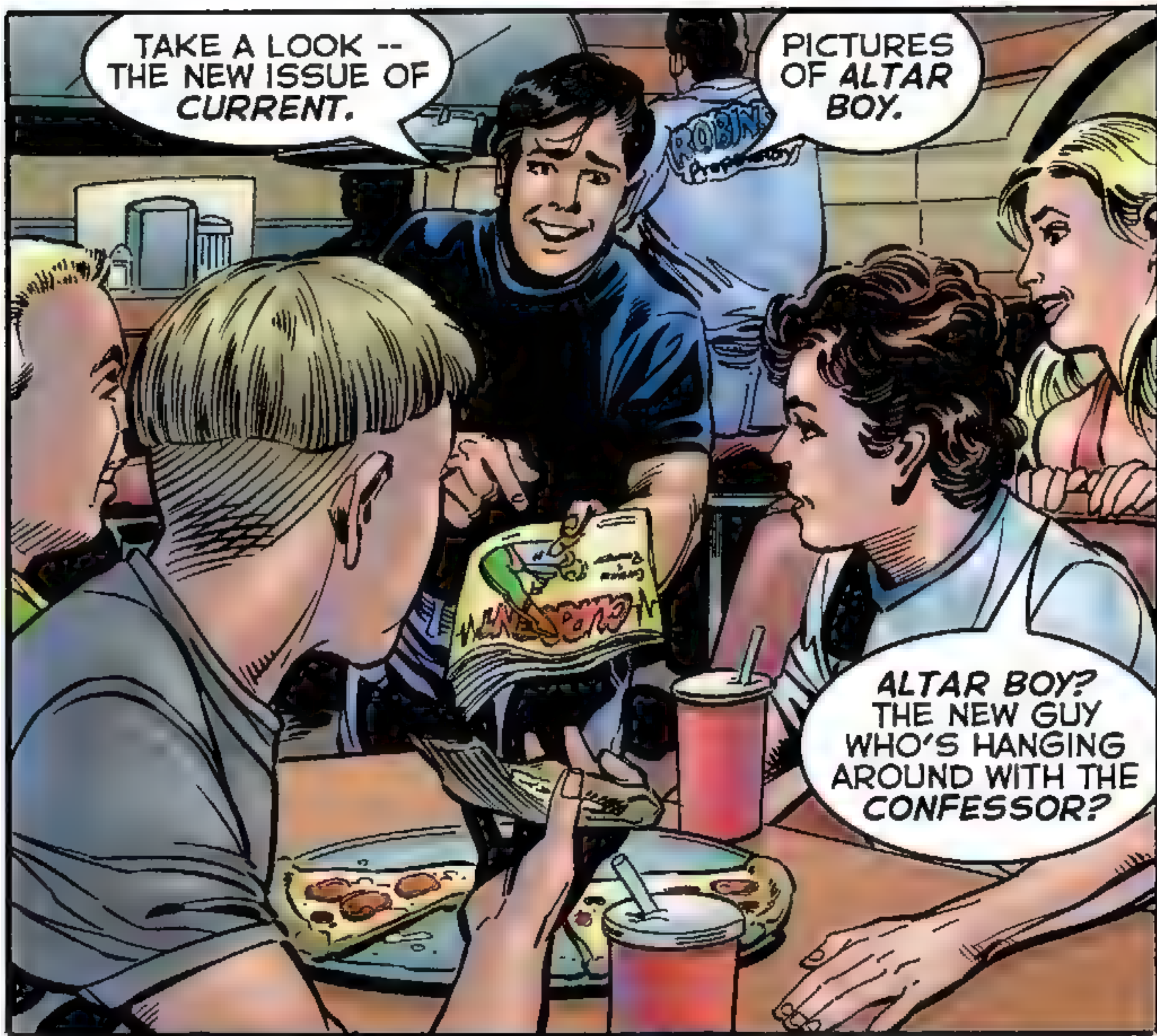
-- AND HE
CAME OUT
OKAY.

WHAT
ABOUT YOU,
BRIAN. WOULD
YOU GO UP TO
SHADOW
HILL?



WELL,
I --

HEY THERE,
EVERYBODY!



TAKE A LOOK --
THE NEW ISSUE OF
CURRENT.

PICTURES
OF ALTAR
BOY.

ALTAR BOY?
THE NEW GUY
WHO'S HANGING
AROUND WITH THE
CONFESSOR?



COOL.

Altar Boy, newest crime-fighter in Astro City,
caught in the act of apprehending



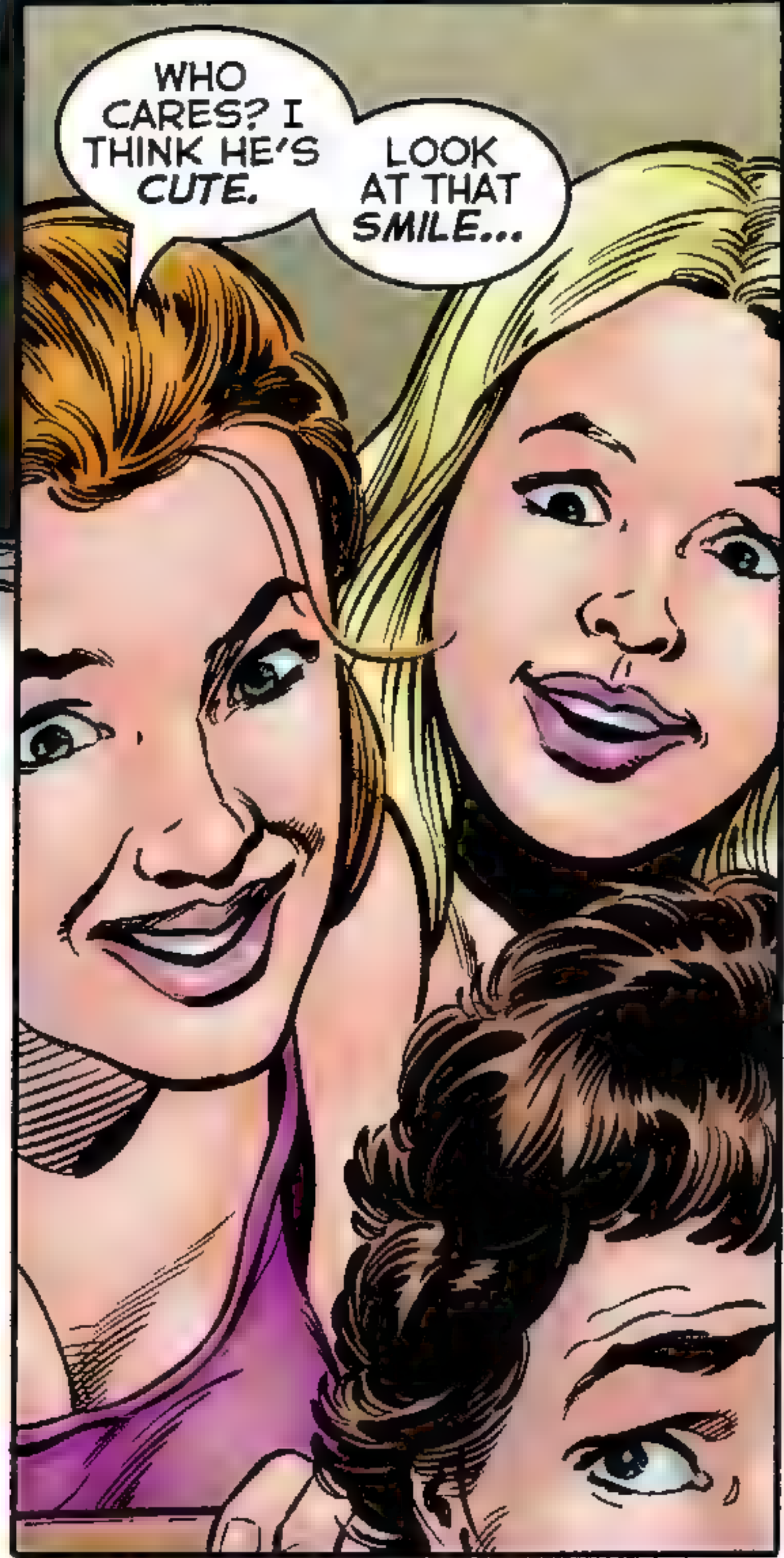
YOU NOTICE
THEY NEVER GET
ANY PICTURES OF THE
CONFESSOR HIMSELF.
I SAW AN 'ARTIST'S
RENDERING' ONCE,
BUT THAT'S IT.

YEAH, HE
STAYS OUT'VE THE
LIMELIGHT. I GUESS
HE HASN'T TAUGHT
THE KID HOW TO DO
THAT YET...



HE
LOOKS LIKE
HE'S ABOUT
OUR AGE.
MAN, THAT
MUST BE
GREAT.

SURE, BUT
"ALTAR BOY"?
IT'S A PRETTY DUMB
NAME, DON'T
YOU THINK?



WHO
CARES? I
THINK HE'S
CUTE.

LOOK
AT THAT
SMILE...



YOU THINK
HE'S CUTE?
REALLY?





SHADOW HILL HAS ITS OWN **PROTECTORS**. AND ITS OWN MEANS OF DEALING WITH **PREDATORS**.

YOU WANT TO TAKE **CARE** -- OVERCONFIDENCE CAN LEAD YOU INTO WORSE TRAPS THAN --

WHOA, WHOA, HOLD IT!



THIS IS WHERE YOU GIVE ME SOME **CRYPTIC LESSON** AND THEN **VANISH**, LEAVING ME TALKING INTO THIN AIR.

WHY DO YOU ACT SO **STRANGE**? WHERE DO YOU GO? WHO ARE YOU WHEN YOU'RE NOT THE **CONFESSION**?



OH, IS **THAT** HOW IT'S DONE?

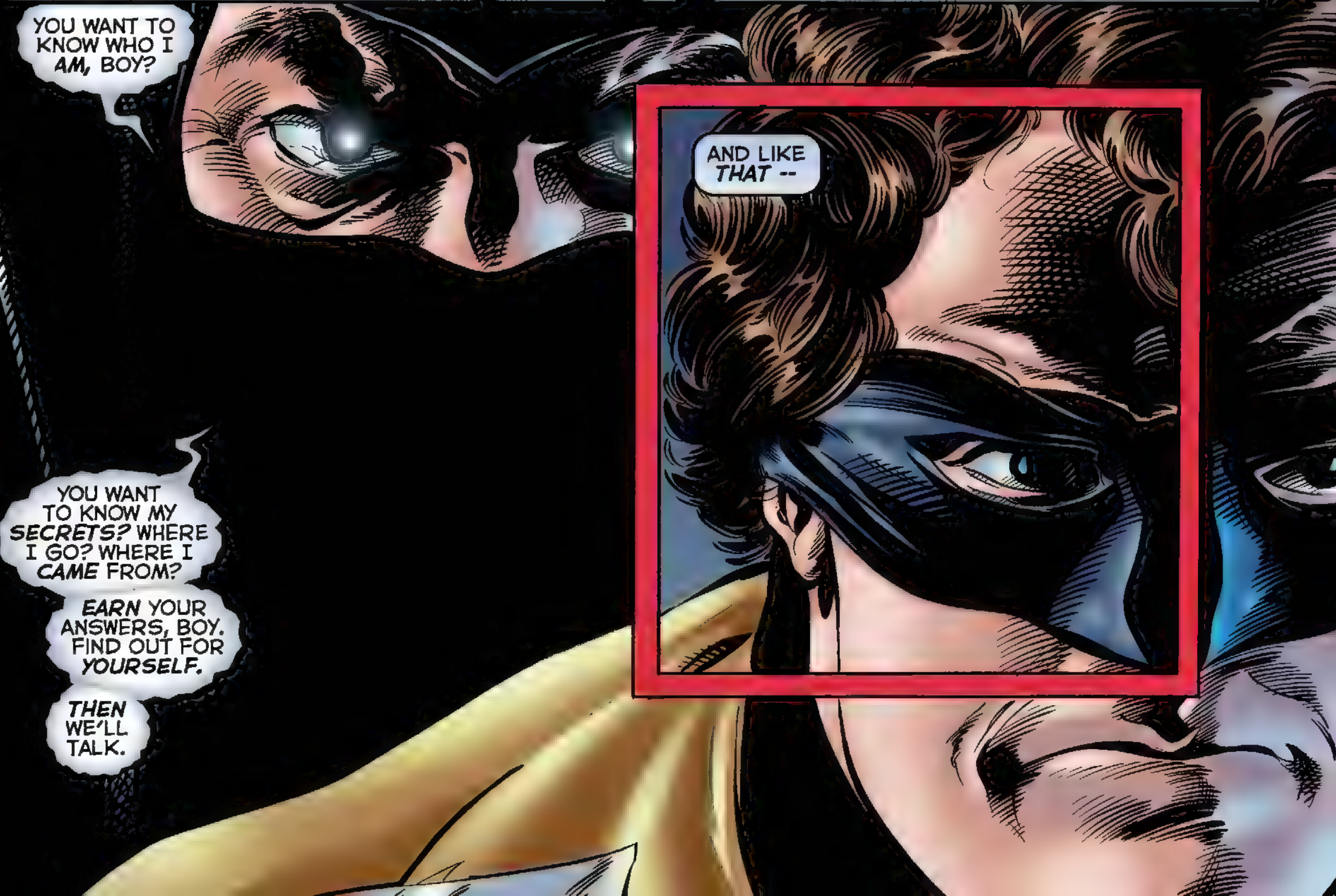


I MUST HAVE BEEN **CONFUSED**. I THOUGHT WE WERE **DETECTIVES**. I THOUGHT WE **INVESTIGATED** AND **DISCOVERED** THINGS.

IMAGINE MY **SURPRISE**. ALL WE NEEDED TO DO WAS **ASK** THE **DEACON** TO TELL US HIS **CRIMINAL PLANS**.

WE'LL JUST **ASK** THE **GUILLOTEAM** WHERE THEY'LL **STRIKE** NEXT.

I DIDN'T MEAN --



YOU WANT TO KNOW WHO I AM, BOY?

YOU WANT TO KNOW MY **SECRETS**? WHERE I GO? WHERE I CAME FROM?

EARN YOUR ANSWERS, BOY. FIND OUT FOR YOURSELF.

THEN WE'LL TALK.

AND LIKE THAT --



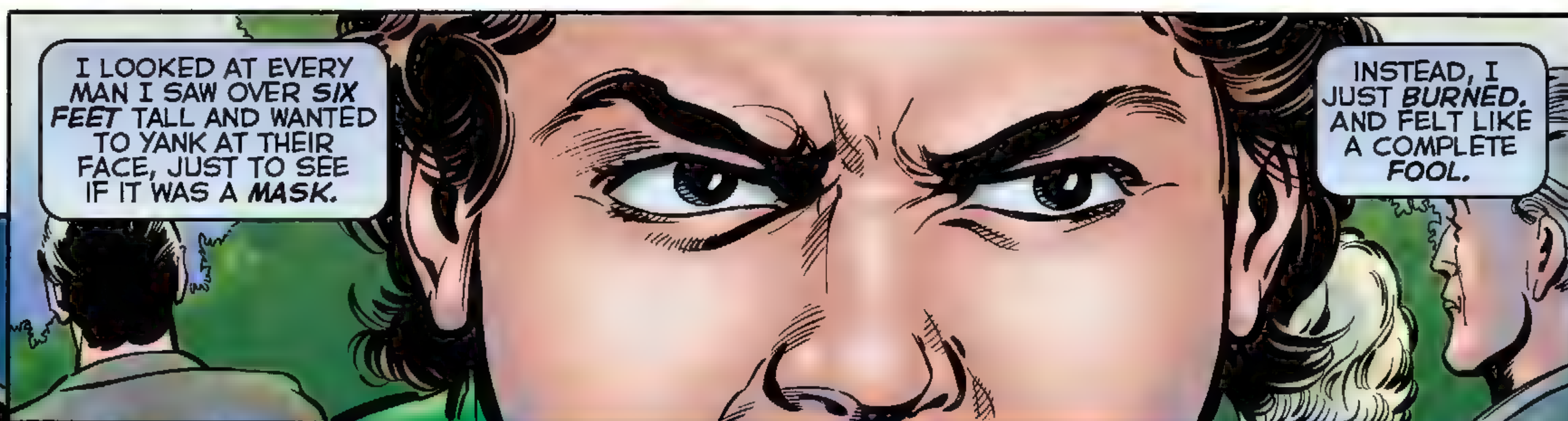
-- HE
WAS GONE.
AGAIN.

AND THE WORST
PART ABOUT IT
WAS THAT HE
WAS *RIGHT*.



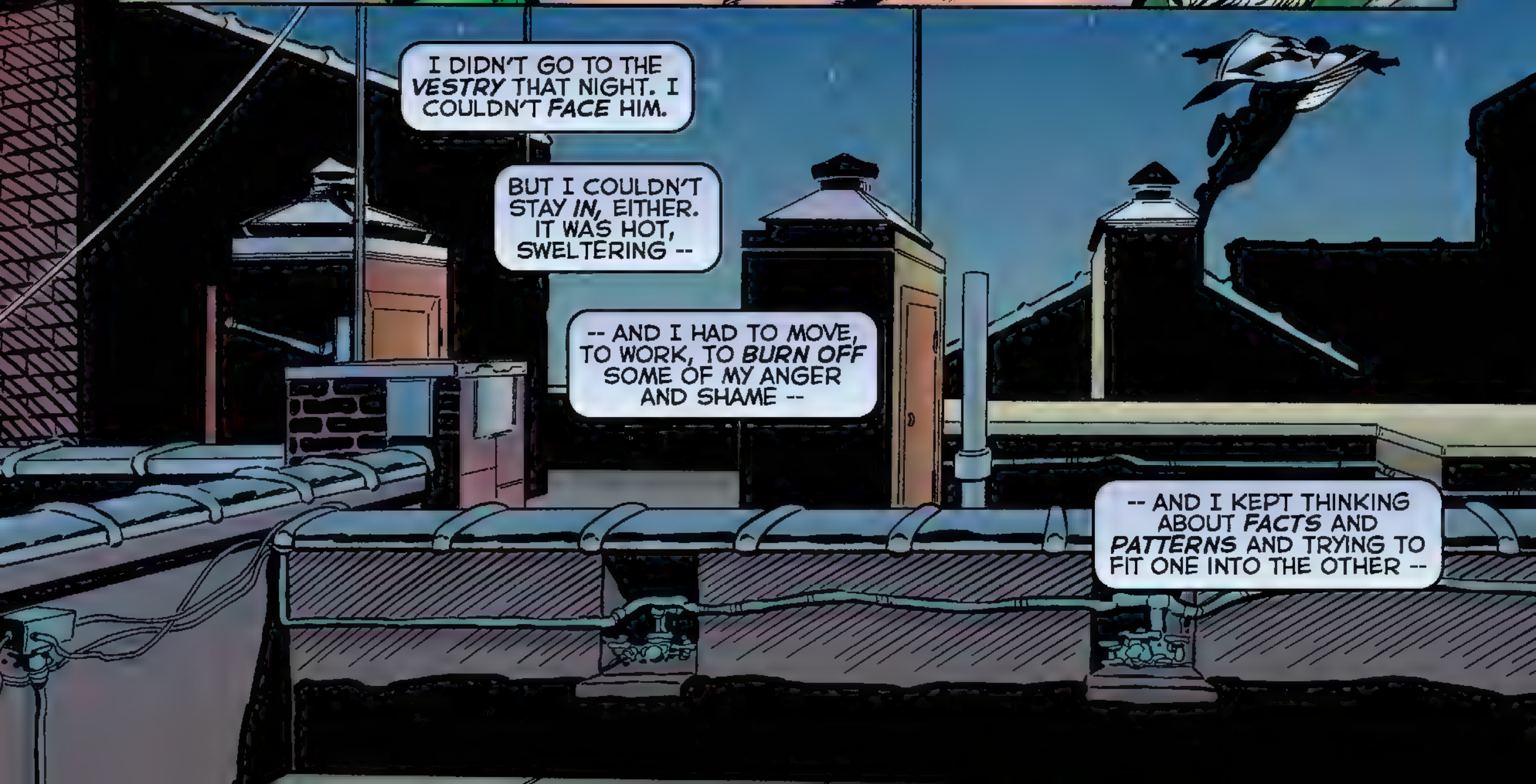
HE'D BEEN
TRAINING ME TO
INVESTIGATE.
TO LEARN. TO
LOOK AT THE
PATTERNS AND
SEE WHAT
DIDN'T *FIT*.

BUT WITH HIM --
I DIDN'T EVEN
KNOW WHERE
TO *START*. I
COULDN'T SEE
THE *PATTERN*
AT ALL.



I LOOKED AT EVERY
MAN I SAW OVER *SIX*
FEET TALL AND WANTED
TO YANK AT THEIR
FACE, JUST TO SEE
IF IT WAS A *MASK*.

INSTEAD, I
JUST *BURNED*.
AND FELT LIKE
A COMPLETE
FOOL.



I DIDN'T GO TO THE
VESTRY THAT NIGHT. I
COULDN'T *FACE* HIM.

BUT I COULDN'T
STAY *IN*, EITHER.
IT WAS HOT,
SWELTERING --

-- AND I HAD TO MOVE
TO WORK, TO *BURN OFF*
SOME OF MY *ANGER*
AND *SHAME* --

-- AND I KEPT THINKING
ABOUT *FACTS* AND
PATTERNS AND TRYING TO
FIT ONE INTO THE OTHER --



-- AND THEN
I SAW HIM.



CRACKERJACK.

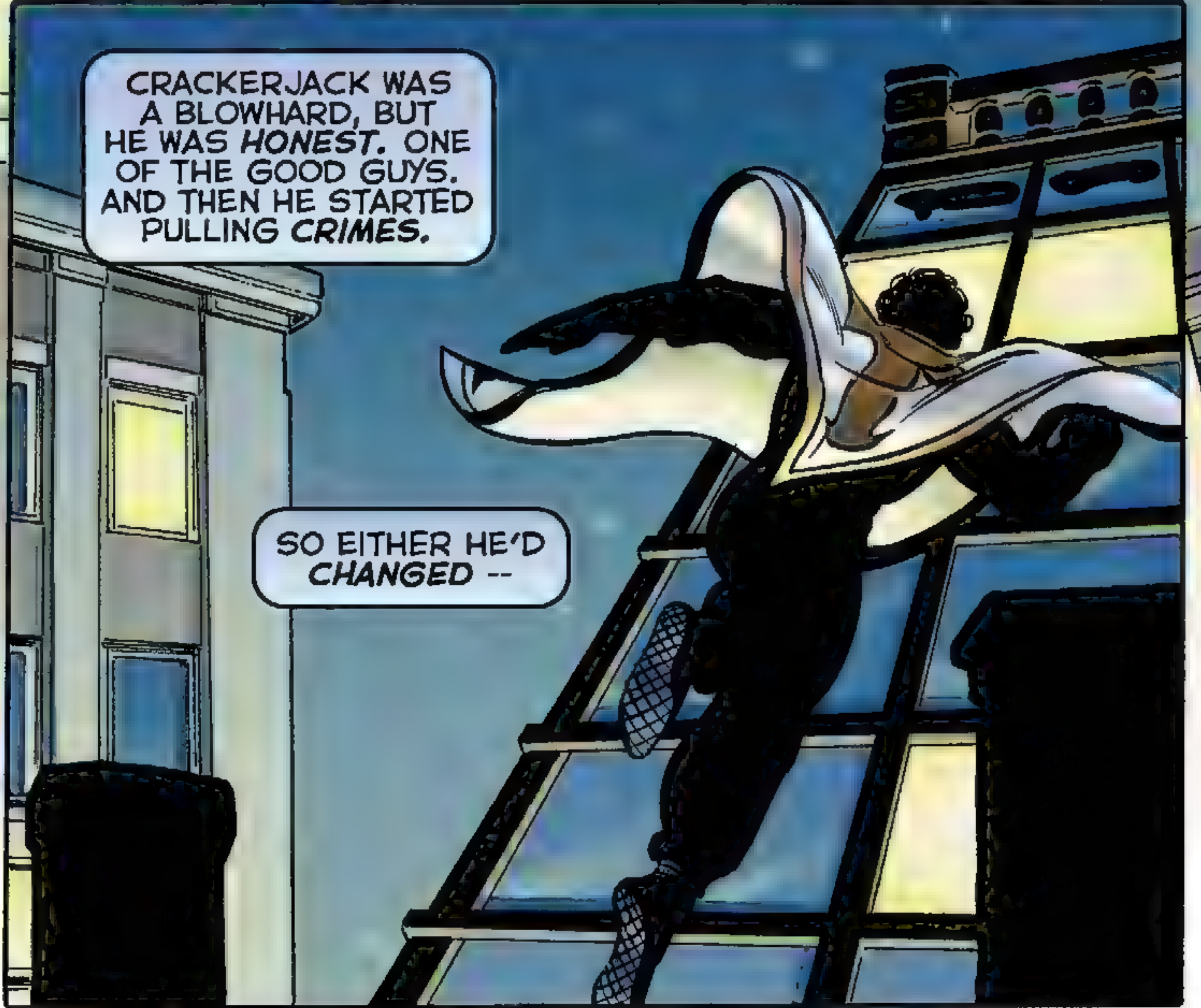
HE'D BEEN A PRETTY
EFFECTIVE SUPERHERO,
EVEN IF HE WAS KINDA GIVEN
TO *GRANDSTANDING*, AND
THOUGHT HE WAS FUNNIER
THAN ANYONE ELSE DID.

BUT NOW HE WAS
WANTED, FOR ROBBERY,
FOR ASSAULT, FOR
OTHER THINGS, AND I
COULDN'T FIGURE OUT --



WAIT A
MINUTE.

LOOK AT THE
PATTERNS, HE
SAID. LOOK AT
THE *PATTERNS*
AND SEE WHAT
DOESN'T FIT.



CRACKERJACK WAS
A BLOWHARD, BUT
HE WAS *HONEST*. ONE
OF THE GOOD GUYS.
AND THEN HE STARTED
PULLING *CRIMES*.

SO EITHER HE'D
CHANGED --



-- OR THE
PERSON PULLING
THE *CRIMES*
WASN'T HIM.



AFTER THE POSSIBILITY OCCURED TO ME, IT WAS EASY TO SPOT THE GIVEAWAYS.

HIS COLORS WERE SLIGHTLY OFF, FOR ONE.



HIS SCEPTER DIDN'T WORK RIGHT, EITHER -- THE REAL ONE WRAPPED AROUND THINGS LIKE A BOLO, IT DIDN'T... GRAB THEM.



MOST PEOPLE WOULD MAYBE MISS THAT -- I'D READ A LOT ABOUT ASTRO CITY'S HEROES, AFTER ALL --

-- BUT IF THEY'D SEEN HIM SKITTERING DOWN THAT ALLEY WALL LIKE SOME GIANT INSECT, THEY'D KNOW HE WAS A FAKE.



ANYWAY, HE HEADED FOR THE MINI-MART'S FRONT DOOR --

TUM-TE-TUM-TUM



-- AND I CHECKED AROUND FOR ANOTHER WAY IN.





-- I WAS MORE
THAN GOOD
ENOUGH TO
STOP HIM.

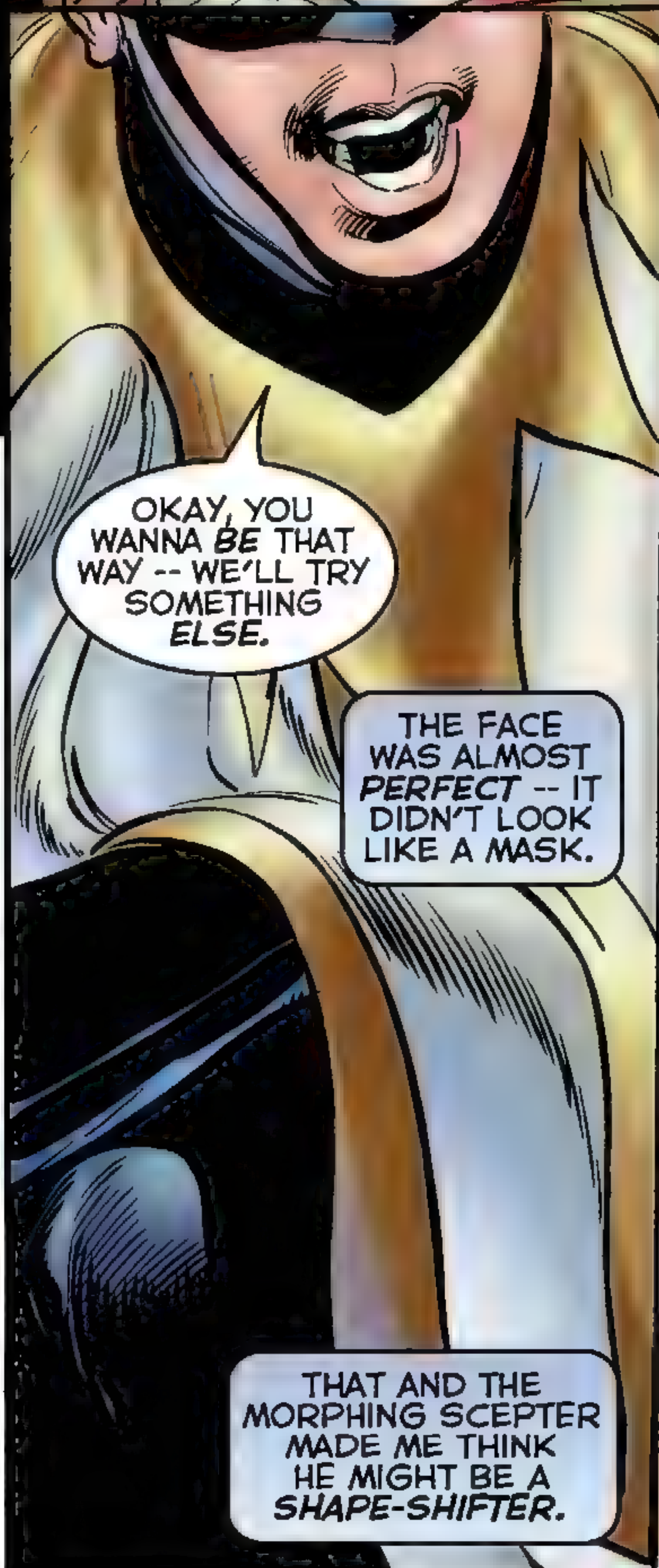


ALL RIGHT,
WHOEVER YOU
ARE -- TALK!

NEVER!

OH,
NO!

TELL ME
I'M NOT SEEING
WHAT I'M
SEEING -- !



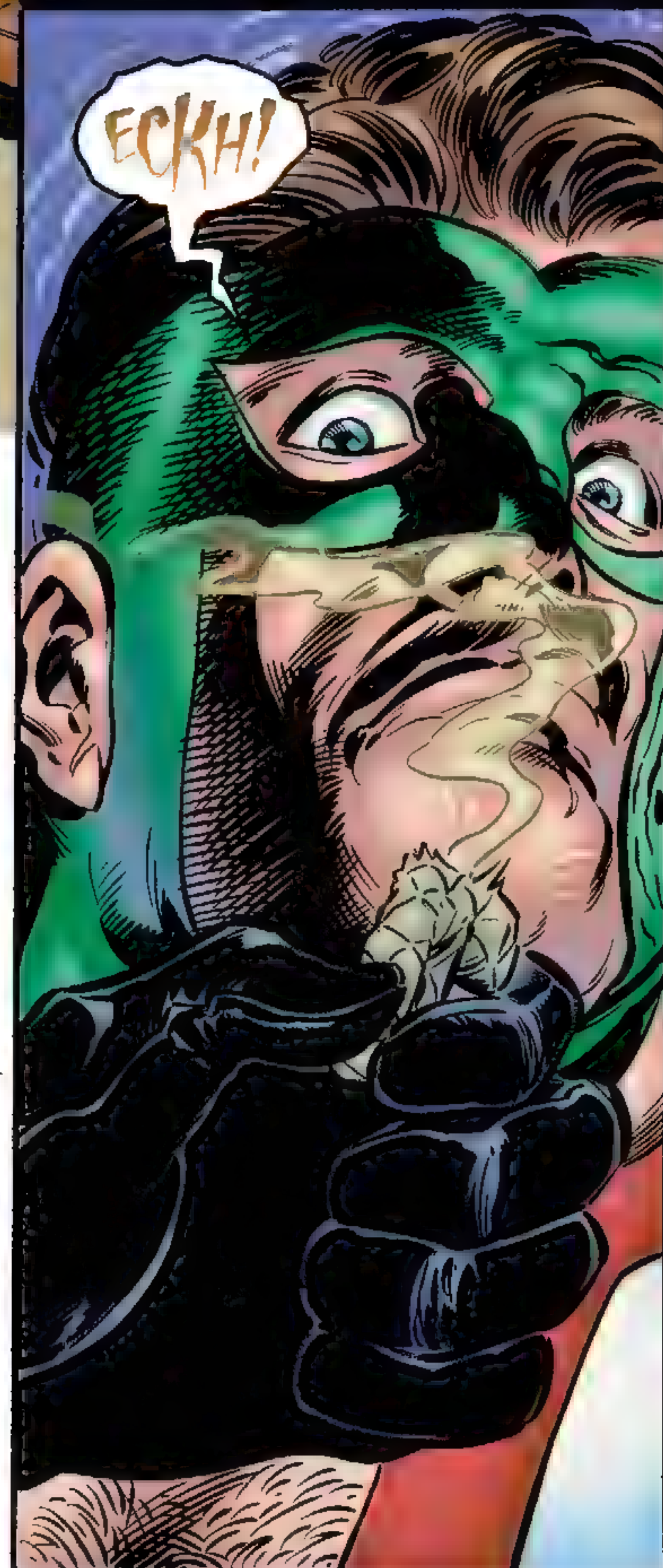
OKAY, YOU
WANNA *BE* THAT
WAY -- WE'LL TRY
SOMETHING
ELSE.

THE FACE
WAS ALMOST
PERFECT -- IT
DIDN'T LOOK
LIKE A MASK.

THAT AND THE
MORPHING SCEPTER
MADE ME THINK
HE MIGHT BE A
SHAPE-SHIFTER.



SO I THOUGHT
SMELLING SALTS
MIGHT DISRUPT HIS
CONCENTRATION.
HOWEVER --



ECKH!





-- SO AFTER WEEKS OF CAREFUL DETECTIVE WORK, I MANAGED TO EXPOSE THE IMPOSTOR AND CLEAR MY NAME.

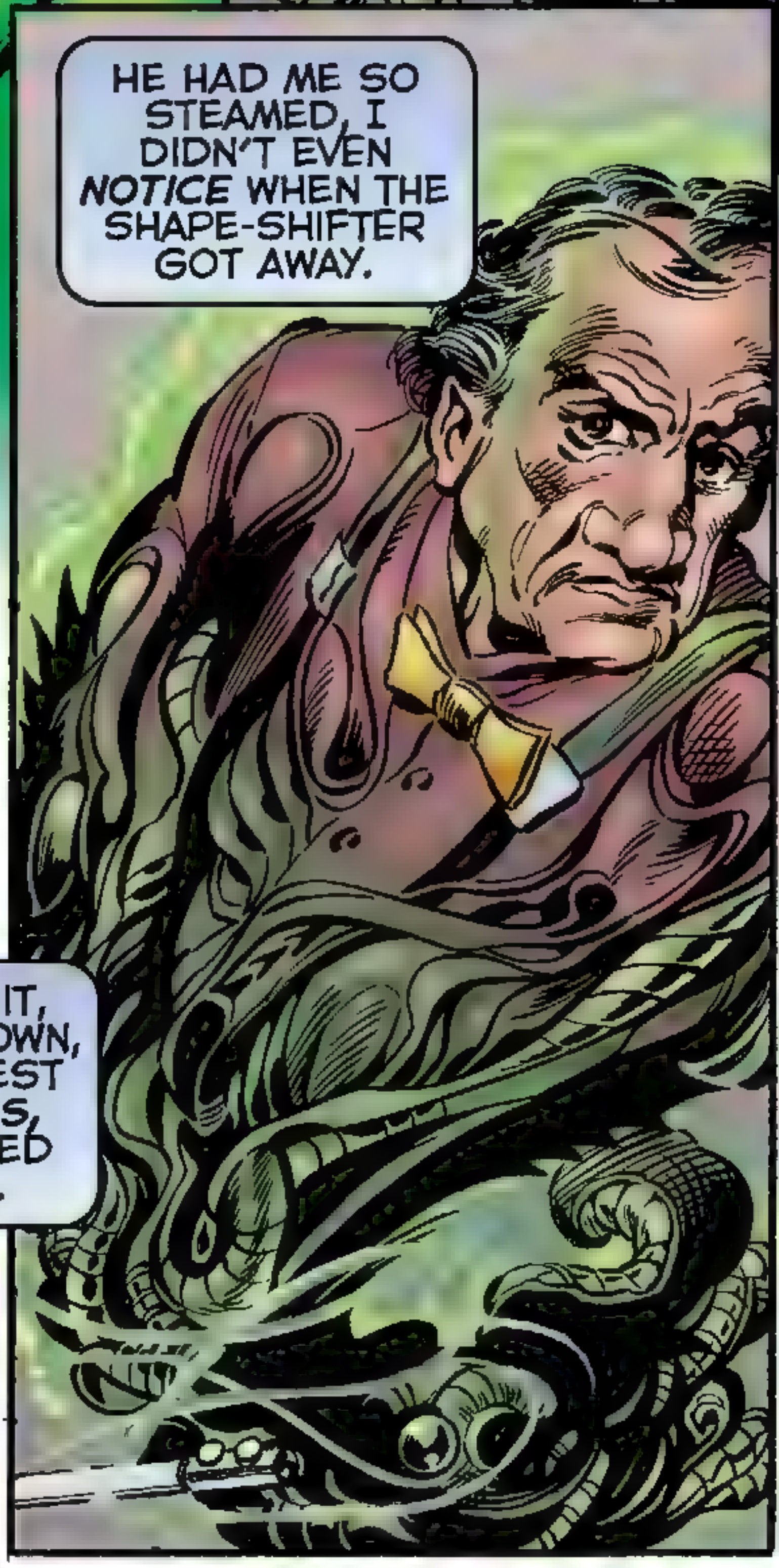
THE NEW KID -- **CHOIRBOY**, I THINK HIS NAME IS -- HE HAPPENED ALONG DURING THE FRACAS --

-- BUT I ALREADY HAD BUG-FACE HERE ON THE ROPES. AND WHAT A BATTLE IT WAS, LET ME TELL YOU! A REAL **DONNYBROOK!** FIRST --



HE TOOK ALL THE CREDIT FOR HIMSELF.

THE WAY HE TOLD IT, IT WAS A KNOCK-DOWN, DRAG-OUT SLUGFEST THAT TOOK *HOURS*, AND I ONLY SHOWED FOR THE FINALE.



HE HAD ME SO STEAMED, I DIDN'T EVEN NOTICE WHEN THE SHAPE-SHIFTER GOT AWAY.



I WAS THINKING IT WAS FOR THE **BEST** -- THAT AFTER LOOKING AT THE WAY THE REPORTERS REACTED TO **CRACKERJACK** --

-- I DIDN'T REALLY WANT TO BE ASSOCIATED TOO CLOSELY WITH HIM. AND BESIDES, I'D DONE WHAT I SET OUT TO DO.



EVERYBODY ELSE, I GUESS, WAS FOCUSED ON THE TV CAMERAS --



YOU'RE
LEARNING.

GHAH!



LEARNING?
UH, YEAH, I
GUESS I
AM.

I LOOKED AT THE
PATTERNS, AND
I SAW THE **FLAW**.
JUST LIKE YOU
SAID.

HEY!
HEY, WHERE'D
HE GO -- ?!

-- AND
CRACKERJACK
MANAGED TO LOSE
CUSTODY OF THE
DOPPELGANGER, ONLY
MOMENTS AFTER
CAPTURING
HIM.



THIS, AFTER
APPARENTLY
WITHHOLDING
EVIDENCE FROM
POLICE INVESTIGATORS
FOR WEEKS --
EVIDENCE THAT
COULD HAVE --



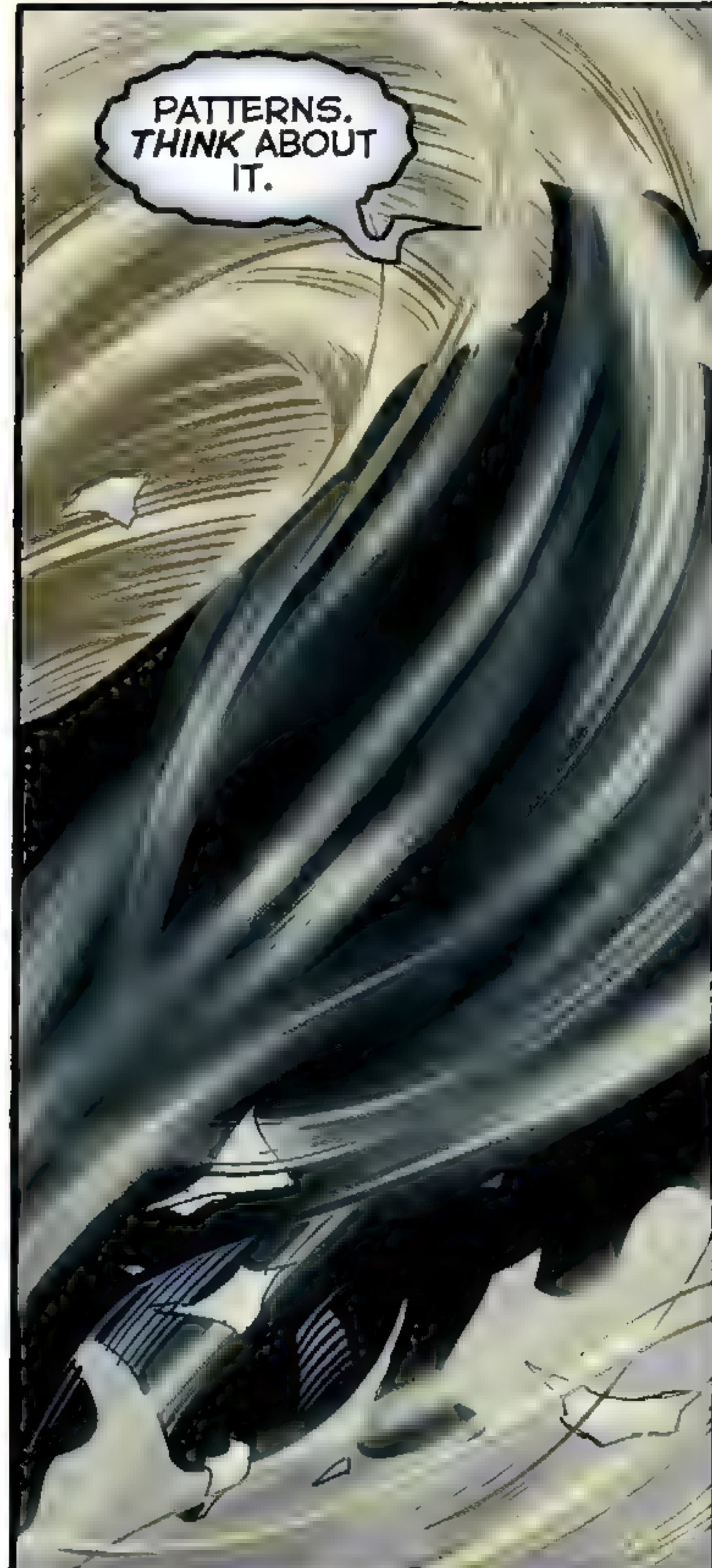
GEEZ, SHE MUST BE
PISSED AT HAVING
BOUGHT INTO THE
SCAM, AND SHE'S
TAKING IT OUT
ON HIM.

YOU KNOW,
HEROES LIKE
HIM, AND **WINGED
VICTORY** -- MAYBE
IF THEY DIDN'T ACT
SO **WEIRD**, THEY'D
HAVE AN EASIER
TIME...



OR MAYBE THEIR
DIFFICULTIES WOULDN'T
HAVE **ARISEN** IF THEY
WEREN'T **VULNERABLE**
TO THEM IN THE
FIRST PLACE.

HUH?



PATTERNS.
THINK ABOUT
IT.



"-- AND A REPORT ON THE LATEST BODY TO BE FOUND NEAR SHADOW HILL --"







THE MARCHES
STARTED WHEN
**SARA-LYNNE
FELTON** DIED.

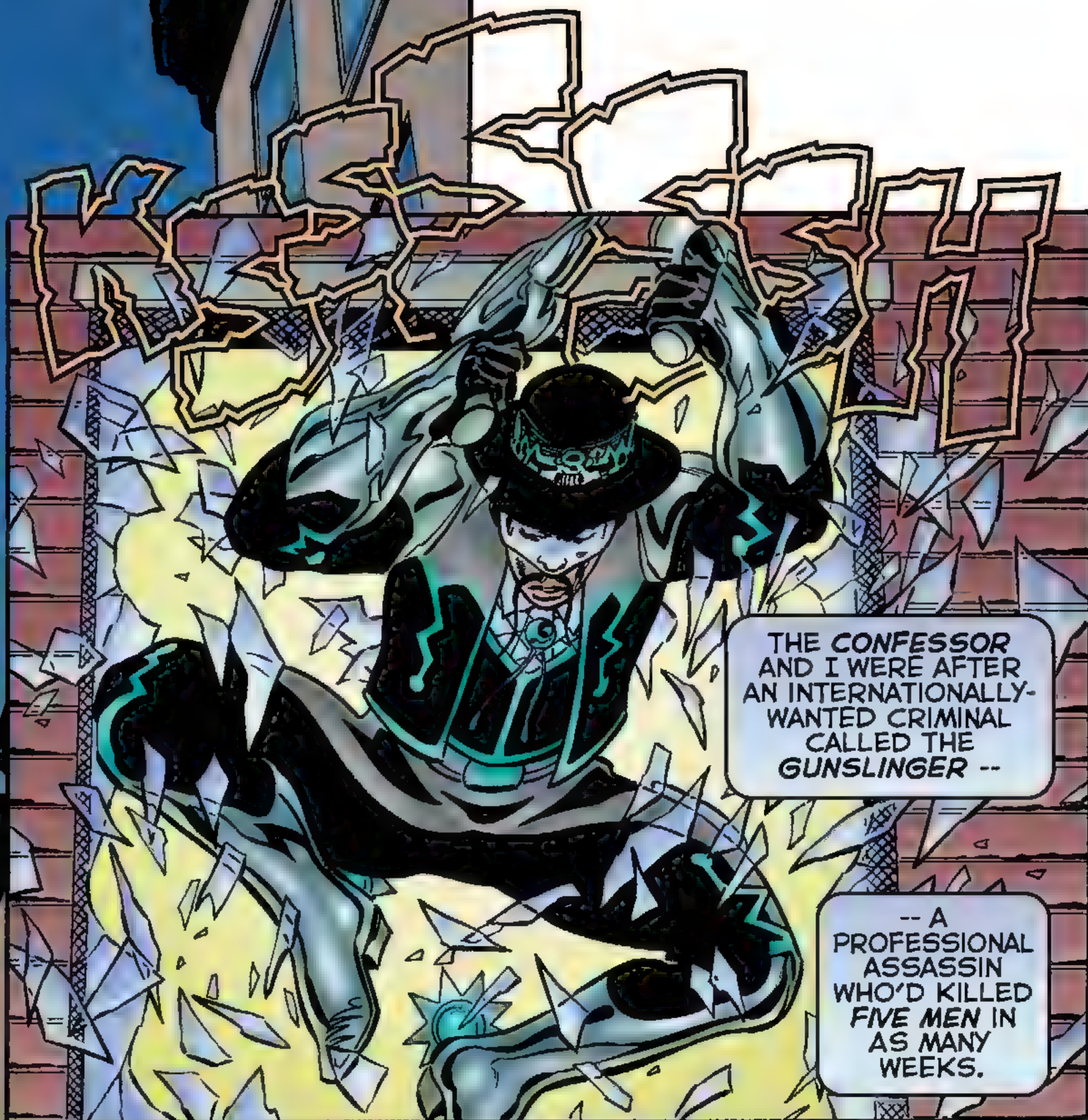
OR MORE
ACCURATELY,
I GUESS --
AFTER HER
BODY WAS
DISCOVERED.



GATHERING DARK

IT HAD BEEN JUST GETTING
HOTTER AND HOTTER --
THE KIND OF DAYS WHERE
NIGHTTIME BRINGS NO
RELIEF FROM THE HEAT --

-- WHERE TEMPER
FRAY AND EVERYONE'S
ON *EDGE*, WAITING
FOR SOMETHING,
ANYTHING TO BREAK --



THE CONFESSOR
AND I WERE AFTER
AN INTERNATIONALLY-
WANTED CRIMINAL
CALLED THE
GUNSLINGER --

-- A
PROFESSIONAL
ASSASSIN
WHO'D KILLED
FIVE MEN IN
AS MANY
WEEKS.

-- AND NOW HE WAS
IN ASTRO CITY.

ALTAR
BOY, STOP!
DON'T --

NO!
I CAN DO
THIS!

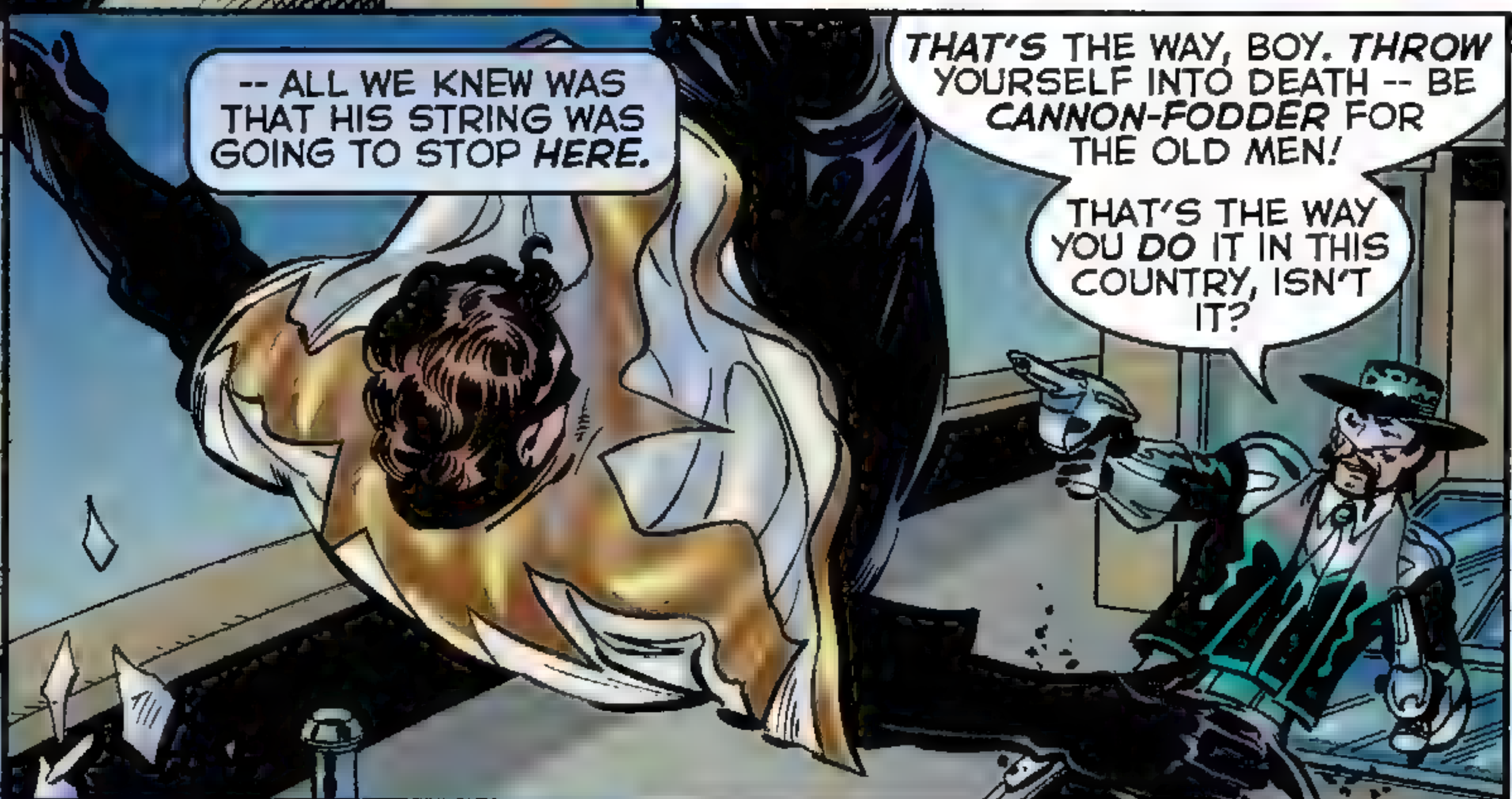
WE DIDN'T KNOW
WHO HE WAS
AFTER, OR WHY --

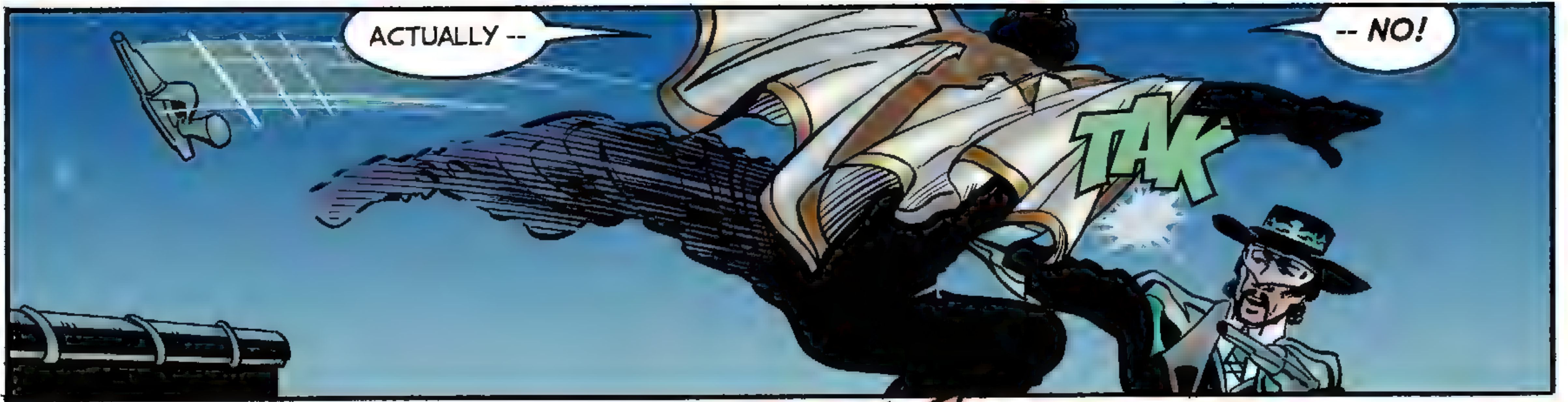


-- ALL WE KNEW WAS
THAT HIS STRING WAS
GOING TO STOP HERE.

THAT'S THE WAY, BOY. THROW
YOURSELF INTO DEATH -- BE
CANNON-FODDER FOR
THE OLD MEN!

THAT'S THE WAY
YOU DO IT IN THIS
COUNTRY, ISN'T
IT?







BUT WE FOUND OUT, AS SOON AS WE GOT BACK TO THE CATACOMBS BENEATH THE ABANDONED VESTRY THE CONFESSOR USED AS A BASE.

IT WAS HARD TO MISS IT. IT WAS ALL OVER THE NEWS.

SARA-LYNNE FELTON WAS A PRETTY, POPULAR EIGHTH-GRADER -- UNTIL SHE BECAME JUST ANOTHER NAME ON A POLICE BLOTTER.

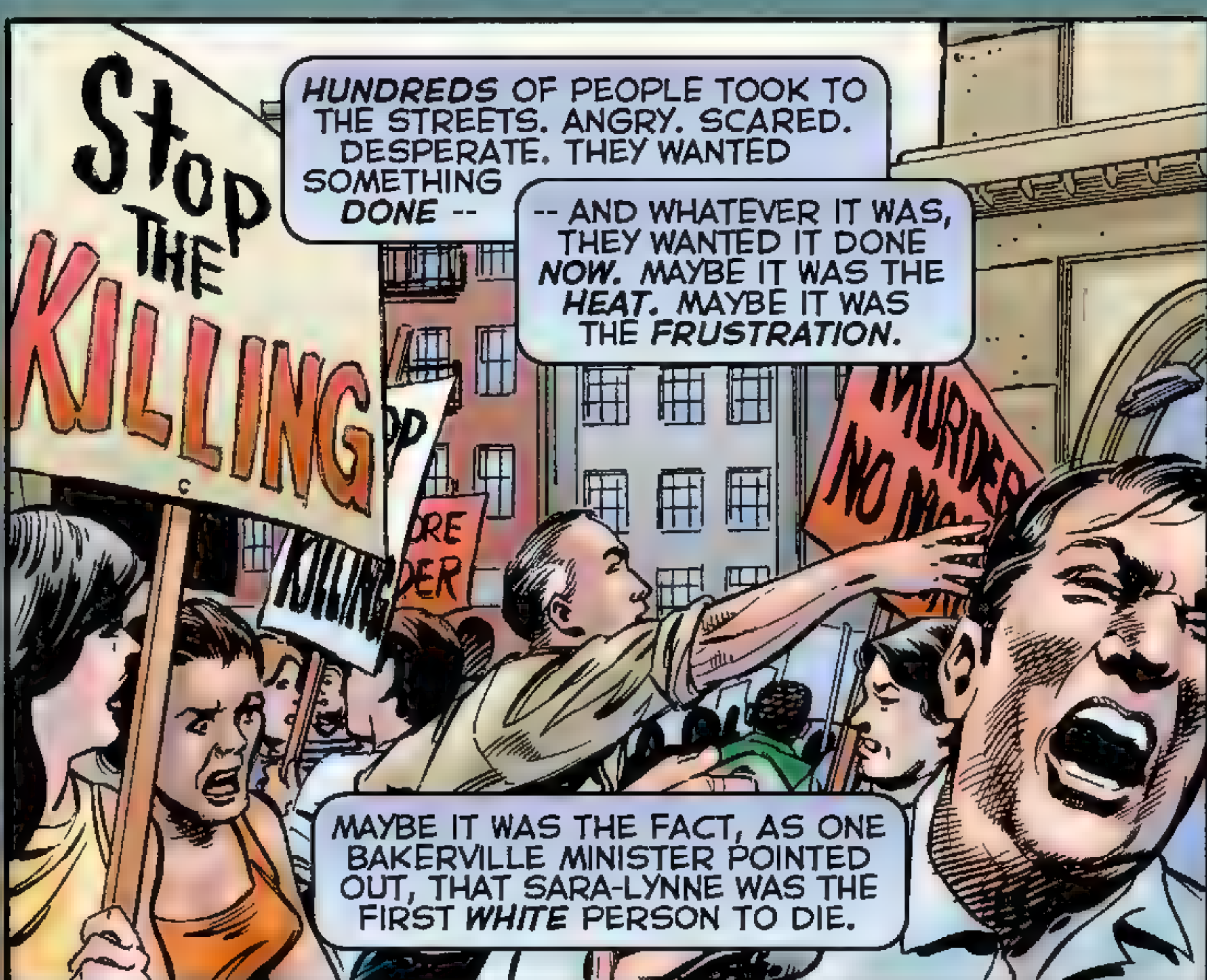
WE WERE WALKING HOME -- SHE WANTED TO GO BUY A MAGAZINE -- THAT'S THE LAST TIME WE SAW HER --

IT'S A TERRIBLE THING -- A TERRIBLE, TERRIBLE THING -- !

IT WAS THE SHADOW HILL KILLER.

SHE WAS THE *EIGHTH* TO BE FOUND. THE EIGHTH KILLED, THE EIGHTH RITUALLY MUTILATED --

-- ALL IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS SURROUNDING SHADOW HILL. BUT SHE WAS ALSO THE *LAST STRAW*.



HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE TOOK TO THE STREETS. ANGRY. SCARED. DESPERATE. THEY WANTED SOMETHING DONE --

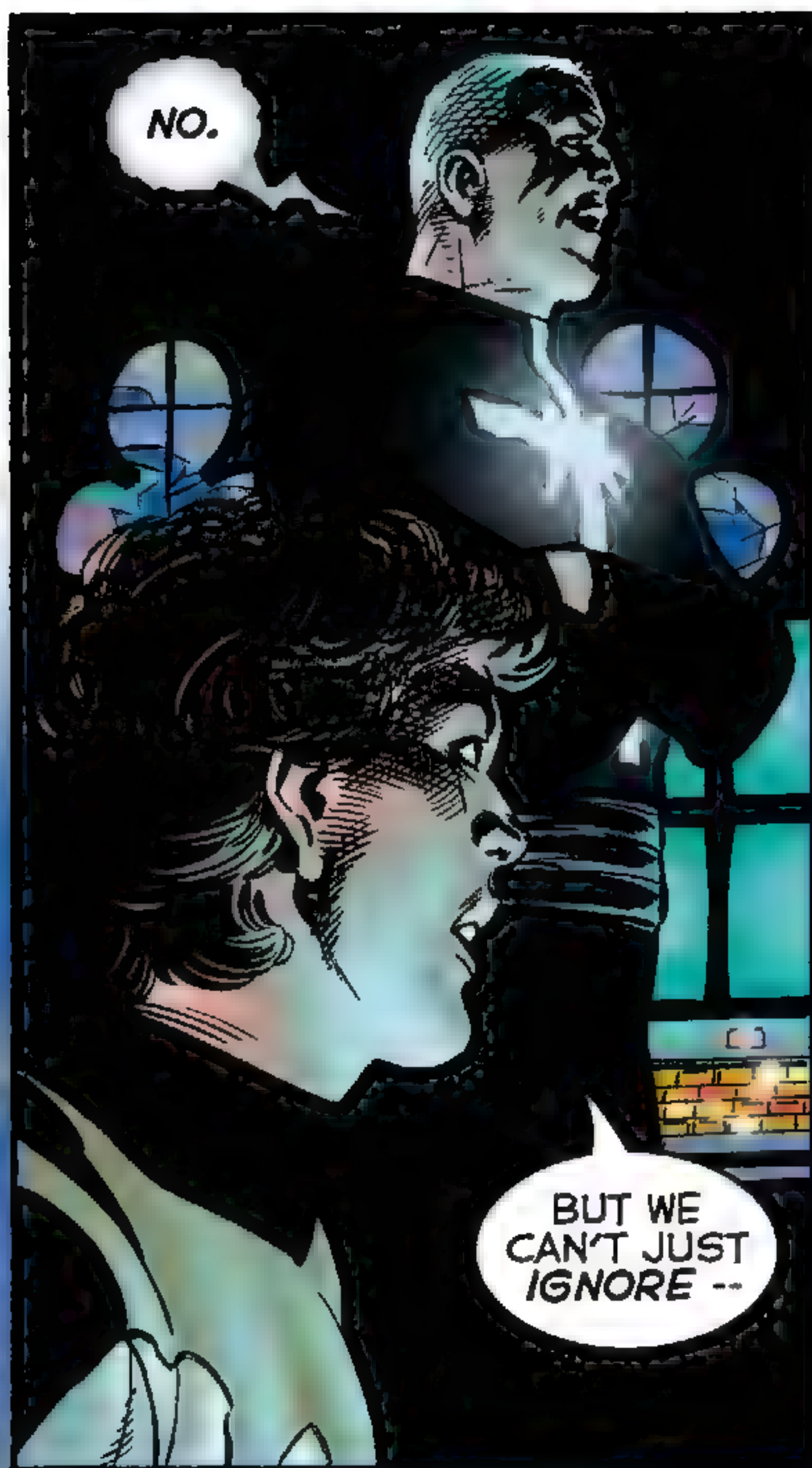
-- AND WHATEVER IT WAS, THEY WANTED IT DONE NOW. MAYBE IT WAS THE HEAT. MAYBE IT WAS THE FRUSTRATION.

MAYBE IT WAS THE FACT, AS ONE BAKERVILLE MINISTER POINTED OUT, THAT SARA-LYNNE WAS THE FIRST *WHITE* PERSON TO DIE.

BUT WHATEVER IT WAS, I FELT IT TOO.

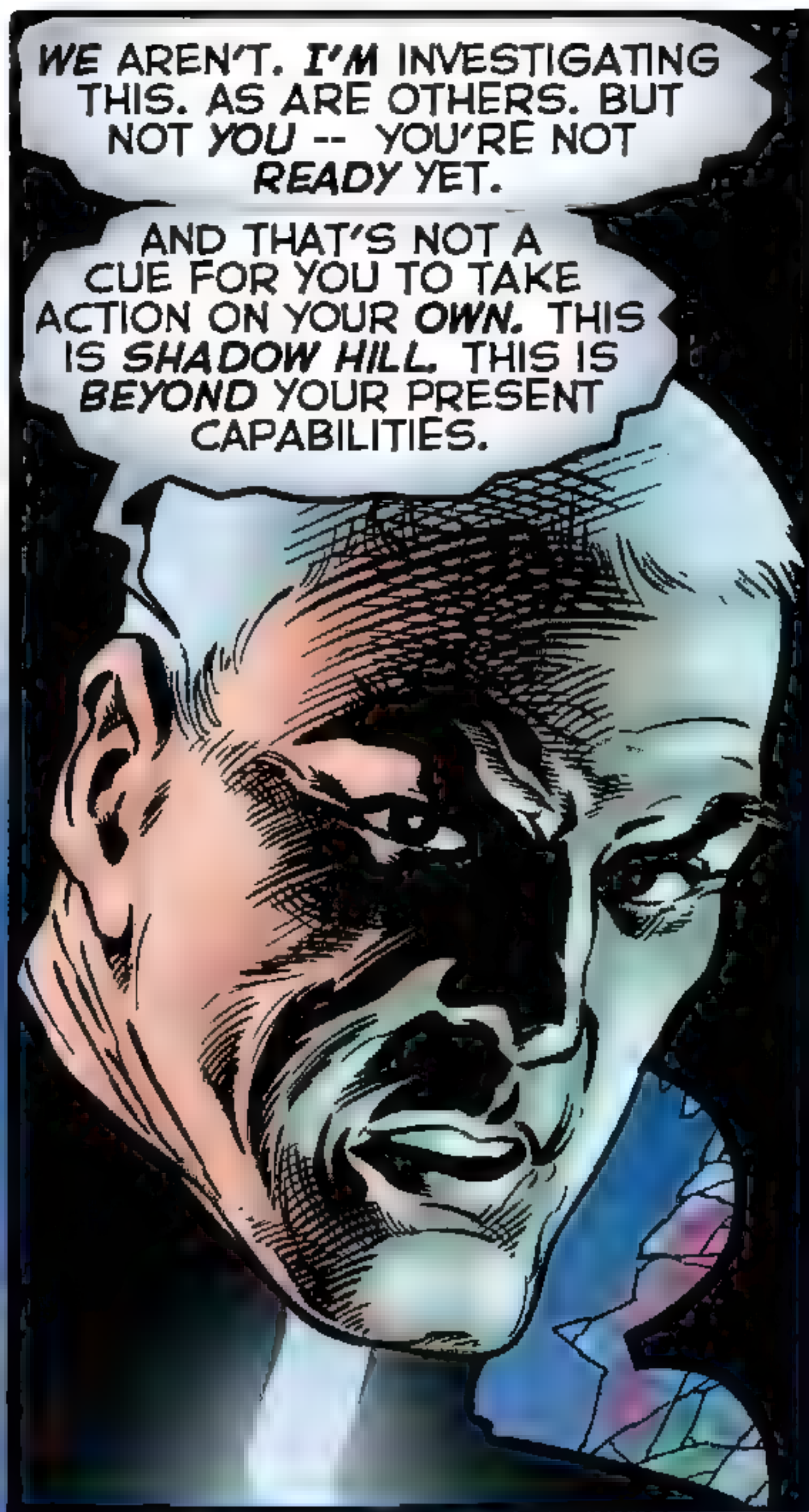
WE COULD PATROL -- INVESTIGATE -- STAKE THE AREA OUT --

THERE'S GOT TO BE SOMETHING WE CAN DO -- !



NO.

BUT WE
CAN'T JUST
IGNORE --



WE AREN'T. I'M INVESTIGATING
THIS. AS ARE OTHERS. BUT
NOT YOU -- YOU'RE NOT
READY YET.

AND THAT'S NOT A
CUE FOR YOU TO TAKE
ACTION ON YOUR OWN. THIS
IS *SHADOW HILL*. THIS IS
BEYOND YOUR PRESENT
CAPABILITIES.



STAY
AWAY FROM
THIS. IS THAT
CLEAR?

I GUESS
HE WAS
RIGHT.



IT'S NOT LIKE I COULD DO
ANYTHING THE *OTHERS* WEREN'T --
ANYTHING THE *OTHERS*
HADN'T ALREADY BEEN DOING.

THE CITY'S *HEROES* WERE
SPENDING SO MUCH TIME
PATROLLING THE BORDERS
OF *SHADOW HILL* --

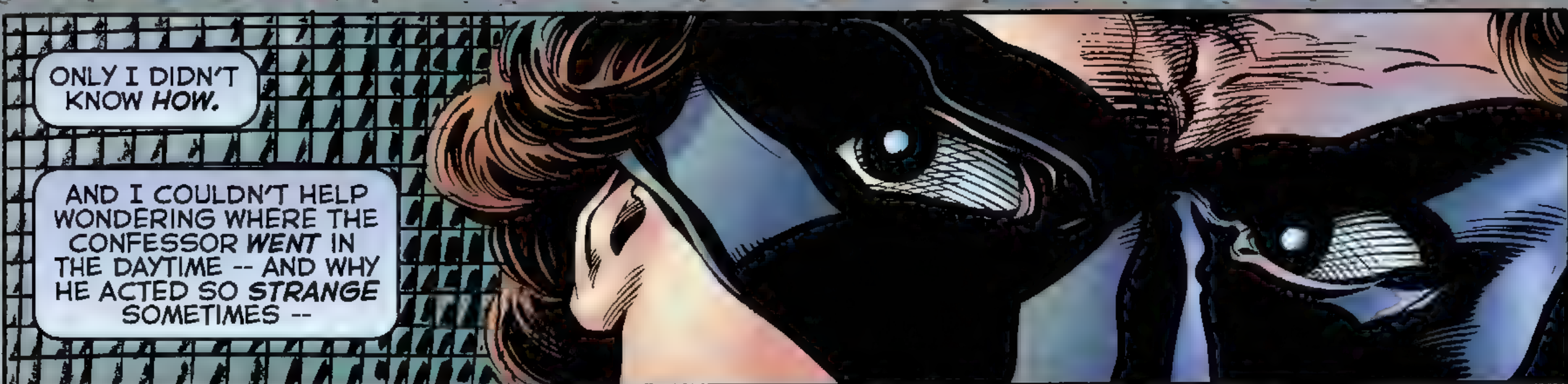
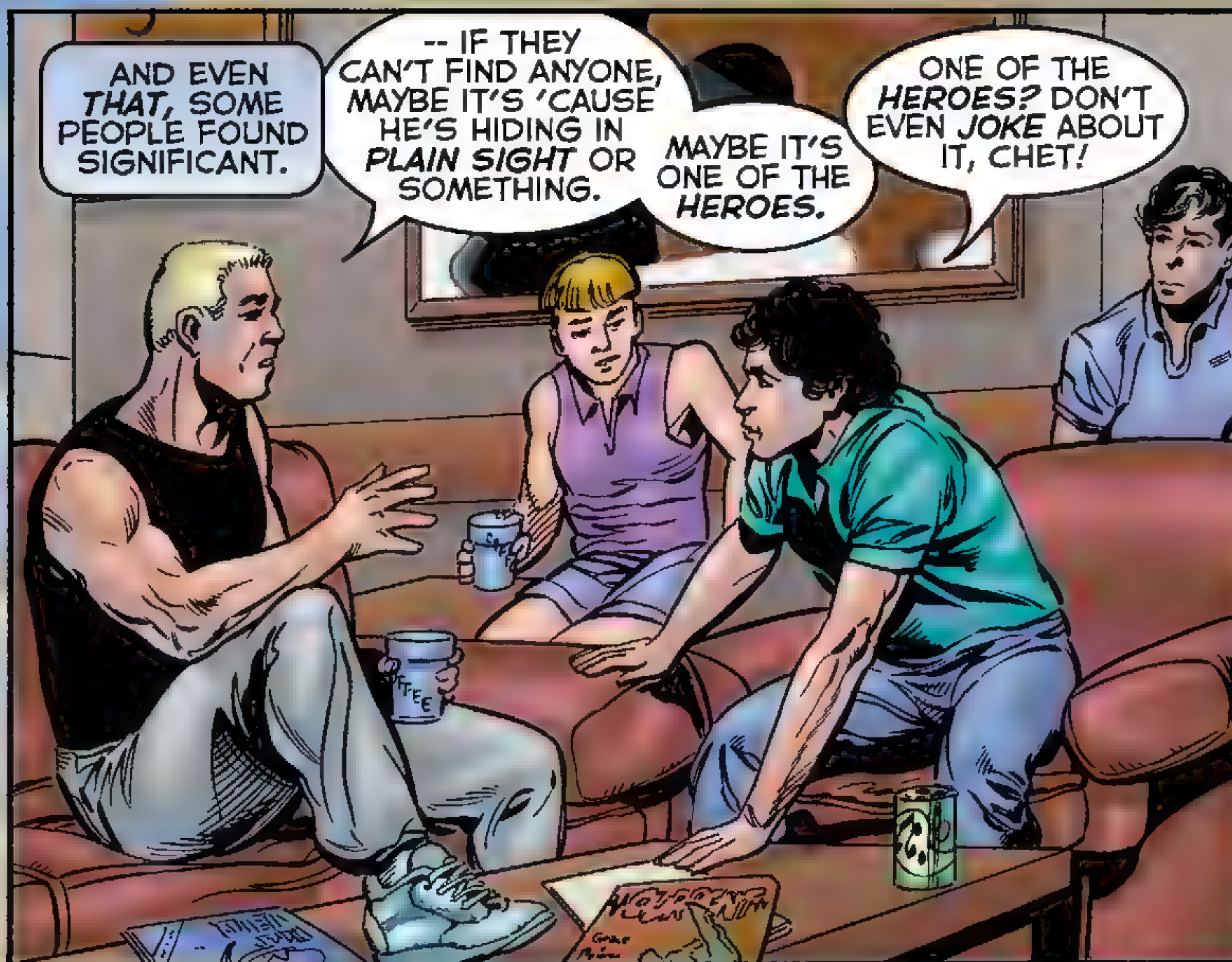
-- THAT CRIME WAS
ACTUALLY RISING
IN *CHESLER*, AND
OTHER DOWNTOWN
AREAS.



EVEN THE *HANGED MAN*
WAS SEEN OUTSIDE
THE *HILL* -- ROAMING,
FOLLOWING SOME PATH
ONLY *HE* COULD SENSE --

-- AS IF HE WAS
SNIFFING FOR
SOMETHING.

BUT NOBODY
FOUND
ANYTHING.



AND THEN TWO MORE BODIES WERE FOUND.

AND MAYOR STEVENSON CALLED A PRESS CONFERENCE.

-- WANT TO THANK YOU ALL FOR COMING.

WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS OF FEAR, AND IT HAS BECOME CLEAR THAT SWIFT, DECISIVE ACTION MUST BE TAKEN.

"-- I HAVE SECURED THE SERVICES OF A SPECIALIST."

HIS NAME WAS MORDECAI CHALK.

A PROFESSIONAL MONSTER-HUNTER, HE'D WORKED MOSTLY IN EUROPE. HE'D LOST AN EYE, AN ARM AND MORE TO THE CREATURES HE FOUGHT --

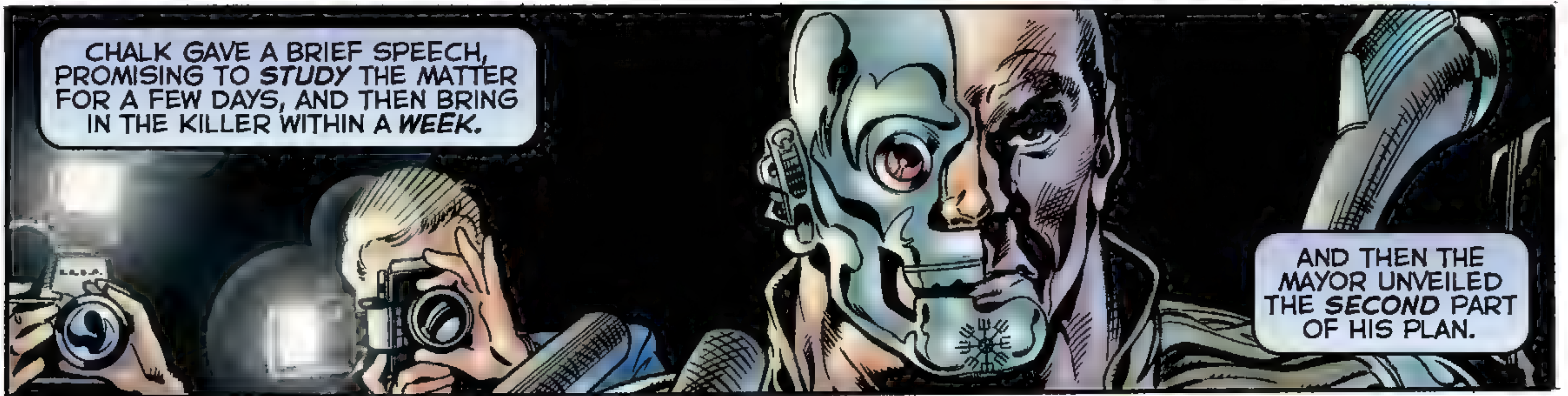
-- AND HAD THEM REPLACED WITH COLD IRON AND SILVER. HIS ONBOARD COMPUTER REFERENCED THOUSANDS OF VOLUMES OF ANCIENT LORE, THE MAYOR TOLD US --

THE THREAT WE FACE IS BEYOND THE ABILITIES OF THE POLICE FORCE, AS CAPABLE AND DILIGENT THOUGH THEY ARE --

-- AND THE CITY'S HEROES, AS WELL, HAVE PROVEN THEMSELVES UNEQUAL TO THE TASK.

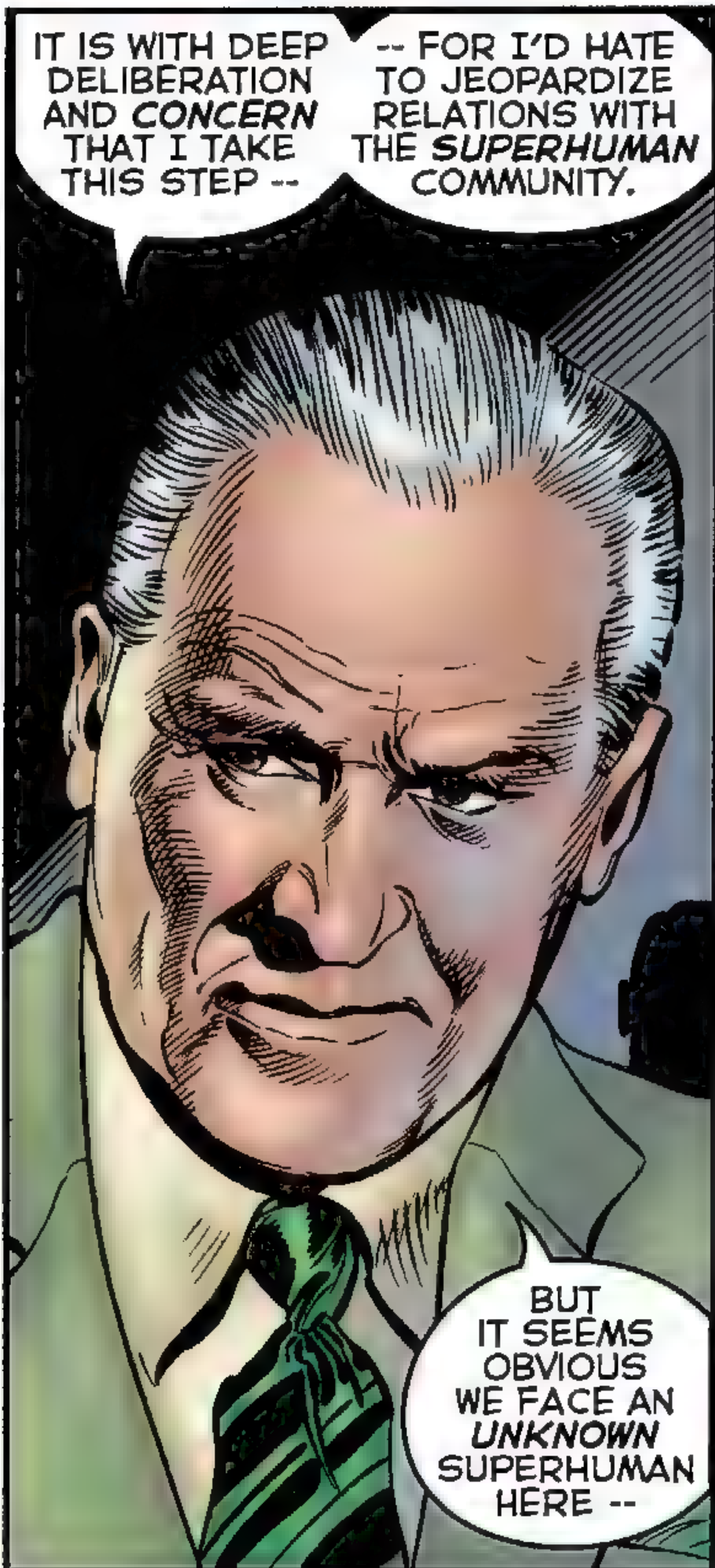
ACCORDINGLY --

-- AND HIS SHOTGUN FIRED SPECIALIZED CHARGES, FROM WOLFSBANE TO HOLY WATER.



CHALK GAVE A BRIEF SPEECH, PROMISING TO **STUDY** THE MATTER FOR A FEW DAYS, AND THEN BRING IN THE KILLER WITHIN A **WEEK**.

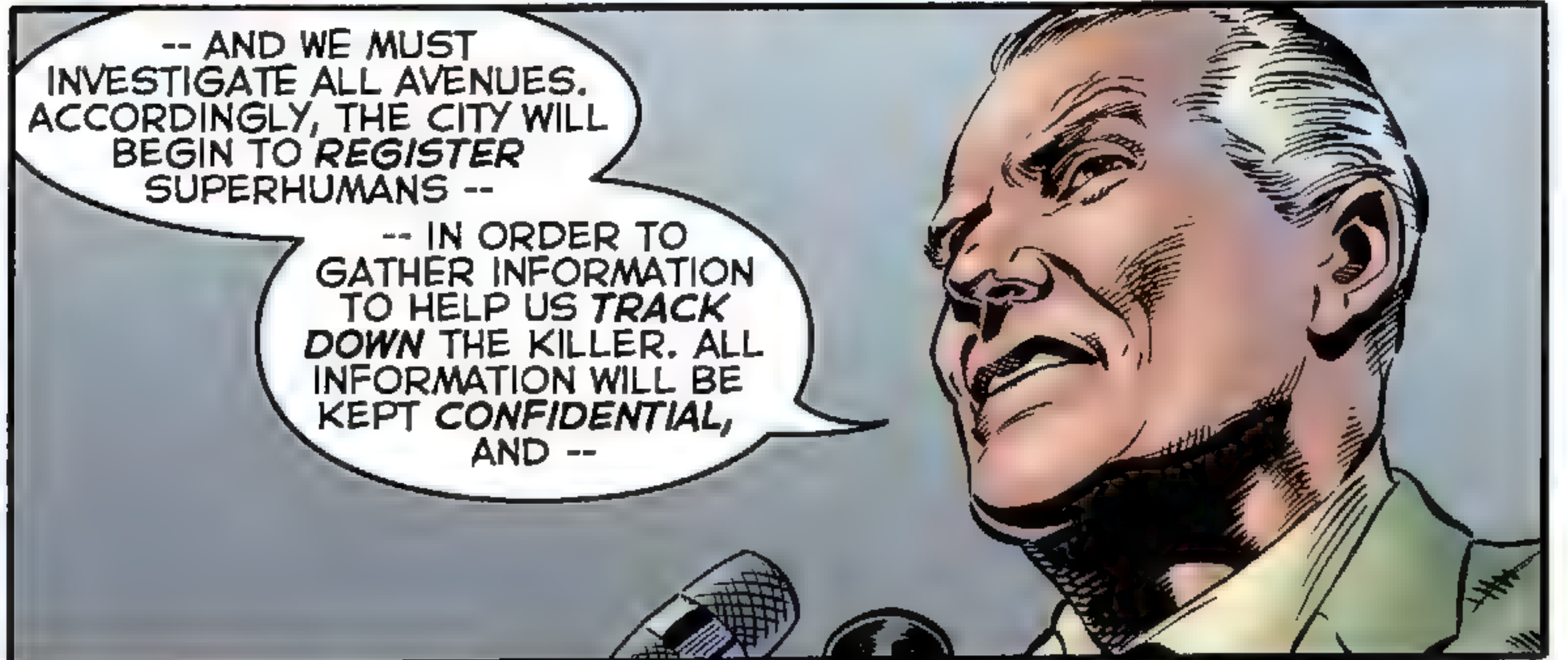
AND THEN THE MAYOR UNVEILED THE **SECOND PART** OF HIS PLAN.



IT IS WITH DEEP DELIBERATION AND **CONCERN** THAT I TAKE THIS STEP --

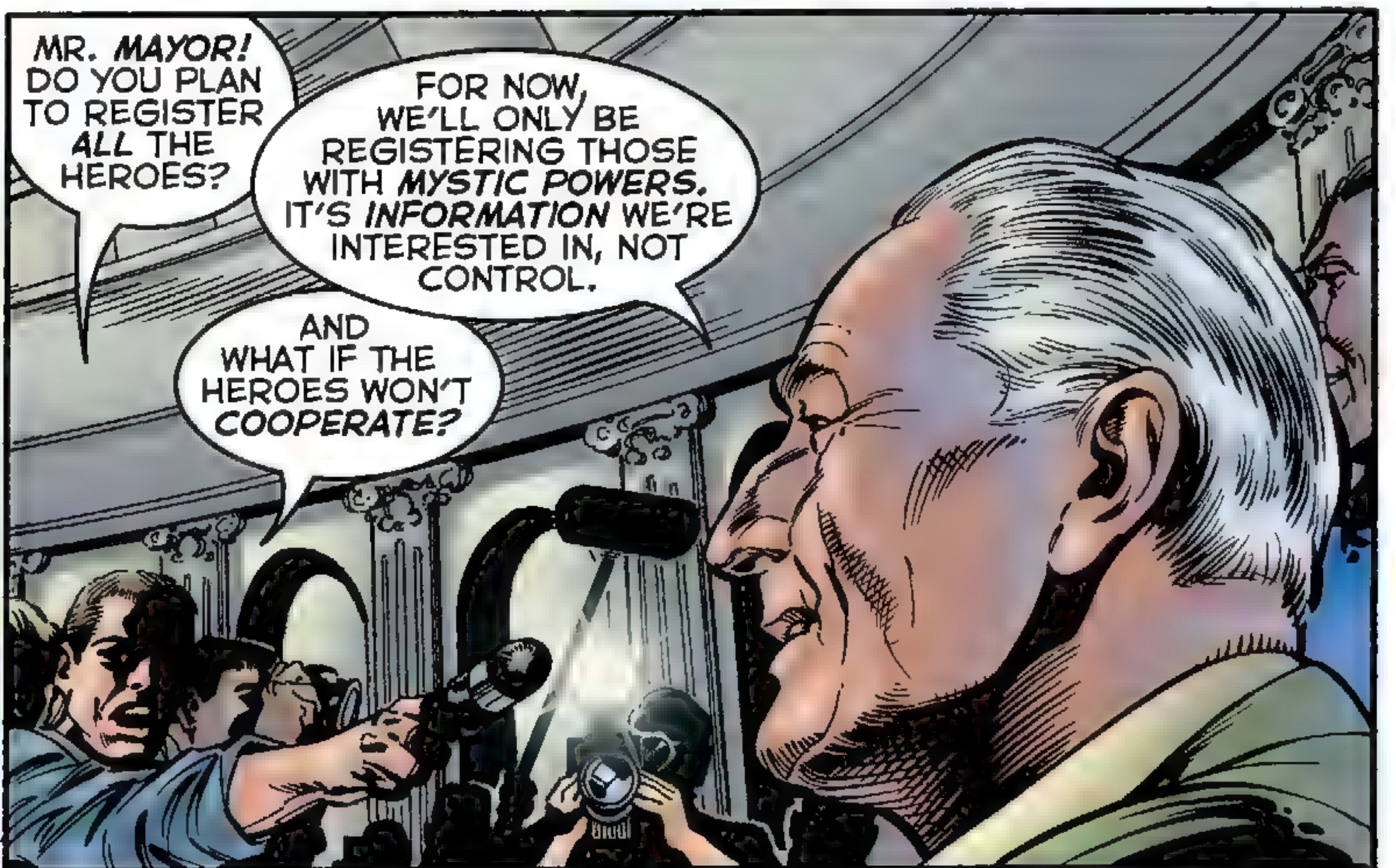
-- FOR I'D HATE TO JEOPARDIZE RELATIONS WITH THE **SUPERHUMAN** COMMUNITY.

BUT IT SEEMS OBVIOUS WE FACE AN **UNKNOWN** SUPERHUMAN HERE --



-- AND WE MUST INVESTIGATE ALL AVENUES. ACCORDINGLY, THE CITY WILL BEGIN TO **REGISTER** SUPERHUMANS --

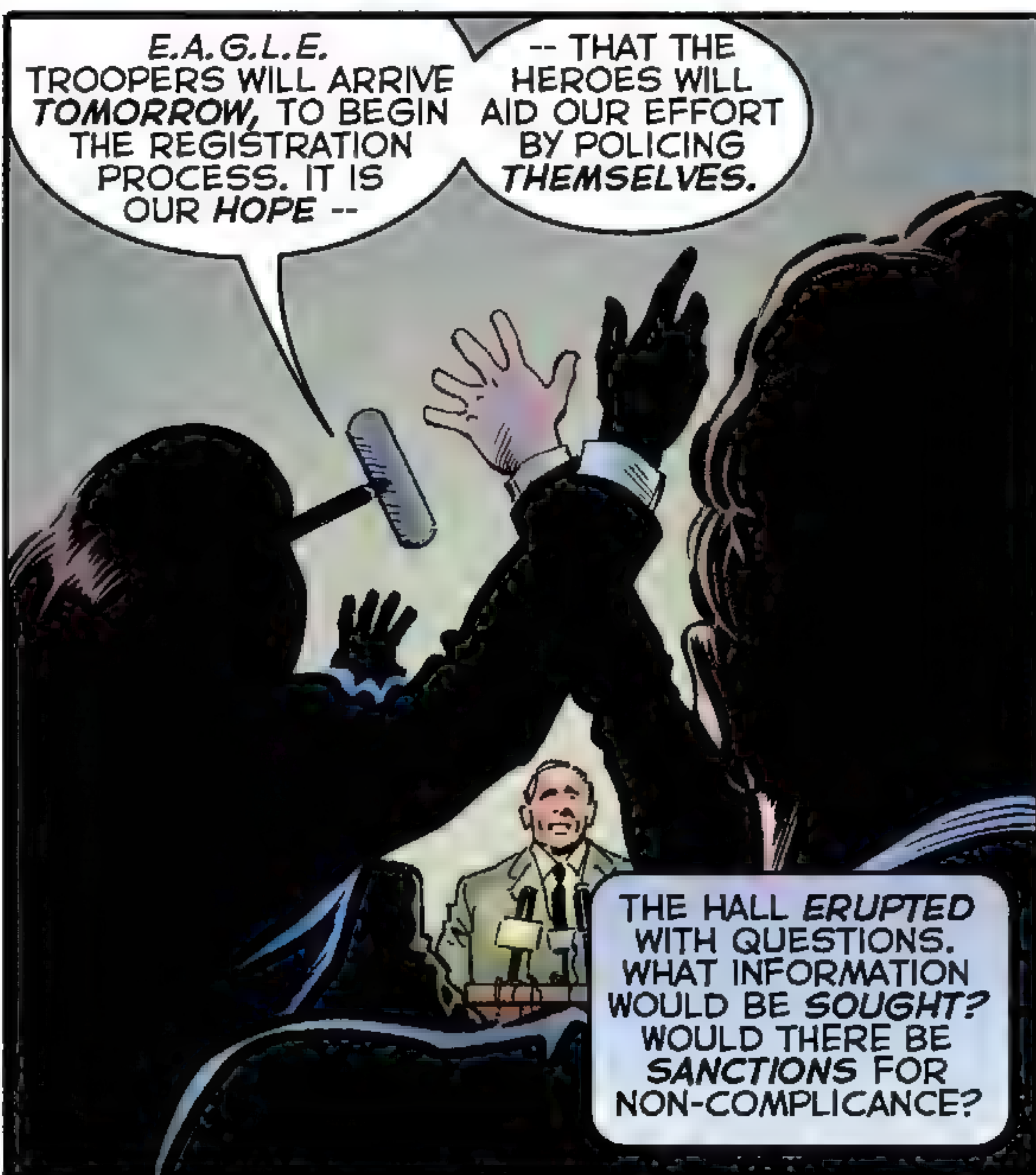
-- IN ORDER TO GATHER INFORMATION TO HELP US **TRACK DOWN** THE KILLER. ALL INFORMATION WILL BE KEPT **CONFIDENTIAL**, AND --



MR. MAYOR! DO YOU PLAN TO REGISTER ALL THE HEROES?

FOR NOW, WE'LL ONLY BE REGISTERING THOSE WITH **MYSTIC POWERS**. IT'S INFORMATION WE'RE INTERESTED IN, NOT CONTROL.

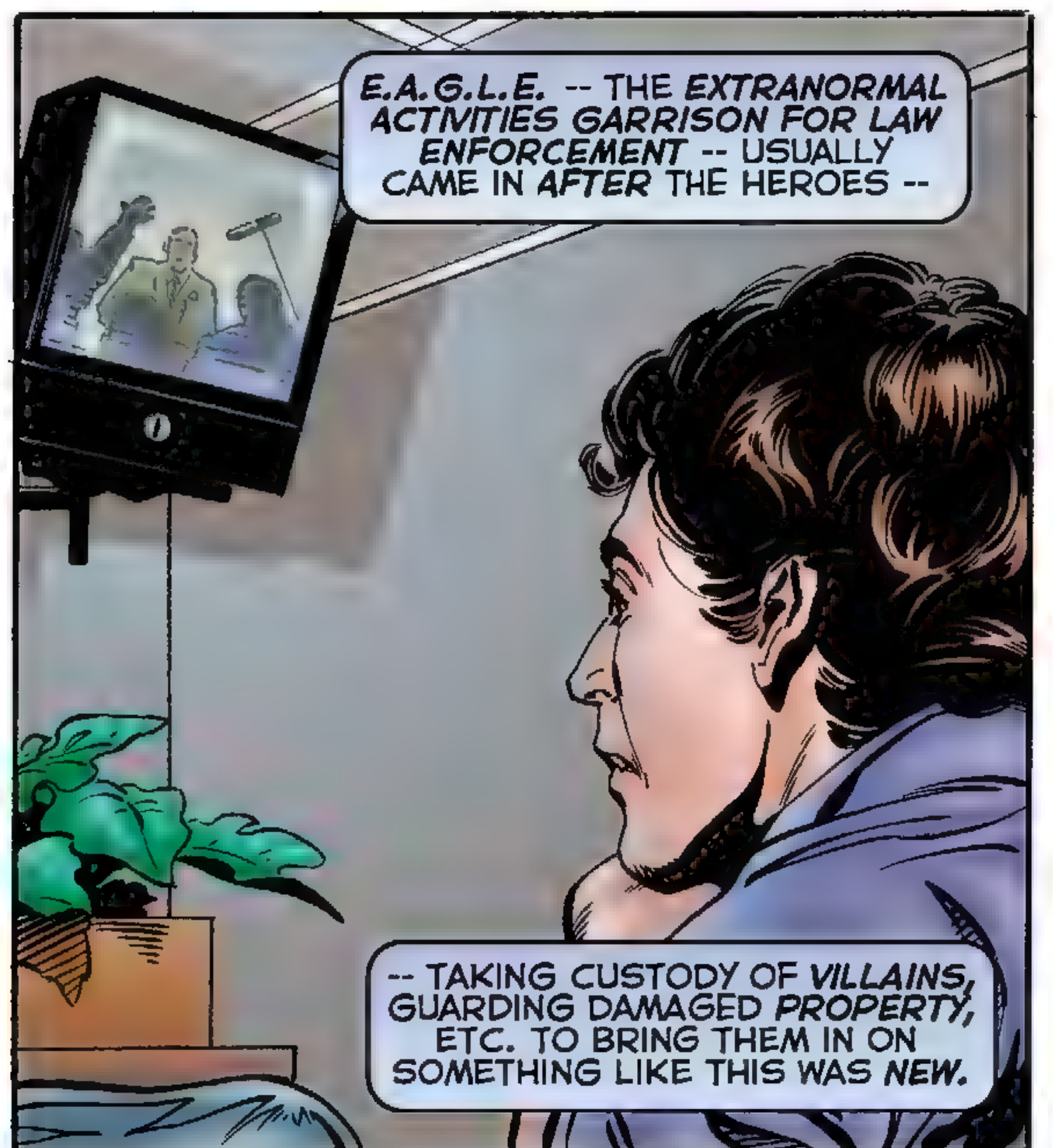
AND WHAT IF THE HEROES WON'T COOPERATE?



E.A.G.L.E. TROOPERS WILL ARRIVE **TOMORROW**, TO BEGIN THE REGISTRATION PROCESS. IT IS OUR **HOPE** --

-- THAT THE HEROES WILL AID OUR EFFORT BY POLICING **THEMSELVES**.

THE HALL ERUPTED WITH QUESTIONS. WHAT INFORMATION WOULD BE **SOUGHT**? WOULD THERE BE **SANCTIONS** FOR NON-COMPLIANCE?



E.A.G.L.E. -- THE **EXTRANORMAL ACTIVITIES GARRISON FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT** -- USUALLY CAME IN AFTER THE HEROES --

-- TAKING CUSTODY OF **VILLAINS**, GUARDING DAMAGED **PROPERTY**, ETC. TO BRING THEM IN ON SOMETHING LIKE THIS WAS **NEW**.



THE MAYOR STRESSED THAT THIS WAS ONLY A *TEMPORARY* MEASURE, COMPILING INFORMATION ONLY, BUT NOT EVERYBODY SAW IT THAT WAY --

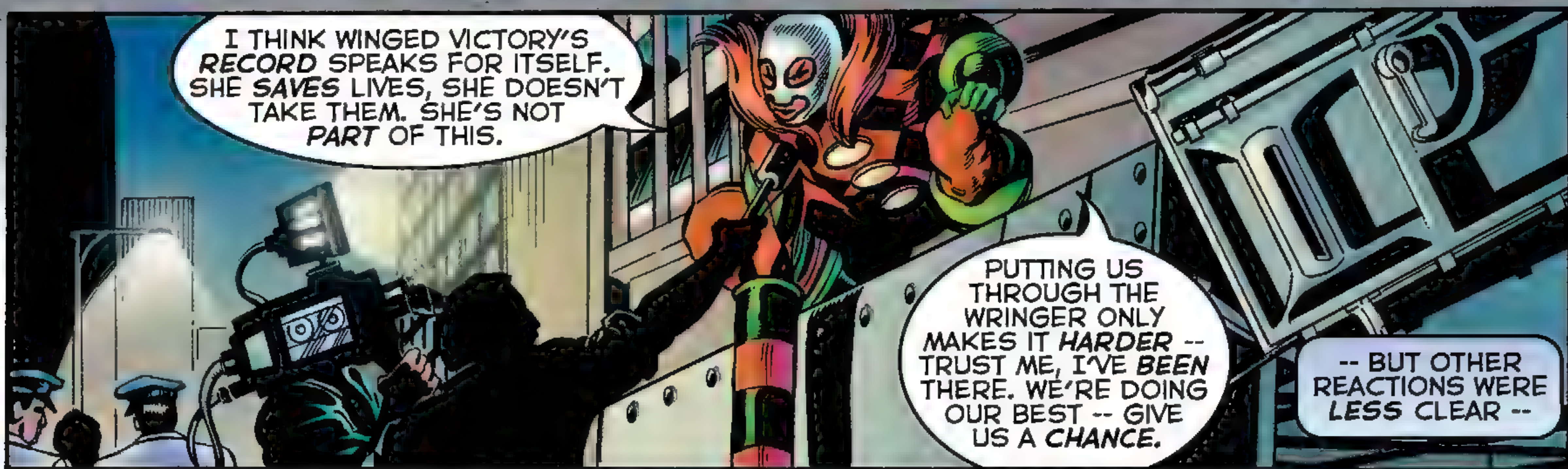
THIS IS A *WITCH-HUNT*. FIRST THAT TRUMPED-UP CHARGE ABOUT THE *SCHOOLS*, AND NOW THIS. THE MAYOR DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO --

-- SO HE'S TRYING TO DISTRACT YOU BY ATTACKING PEOPLE LIKE ME.

WELL, MR. MAYOR -- I'VE ACCOMPLISHED A LOT HERE, EVEN IF YOU DO FIND ME THREATENING.

GO ASK THE *HANGED MAN* FOR HIS SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER. I'M NOT PLAYING -- AND I'M NOT LEAVING, EITHER.

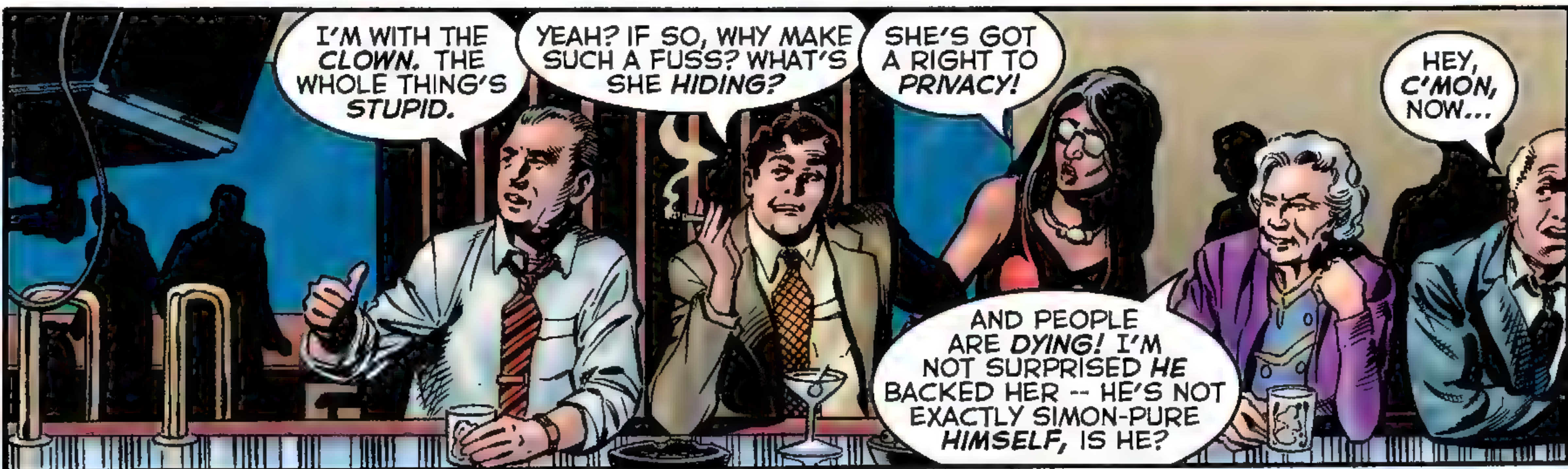
WINGED VICTORY'S OUTBURST WON SOME SUPPORT --



I THINK WINGED VICTORY'S *RECORD* SPEAKS FOR ITSELF. SHE *SAVES* LIVES, SHE DOESN'T TAKE THEM. SHE'S NOT PART OF THIS.

PUTTING US THROUGH THE WRINGER ONLY MAKES IT *HARDER* -- TRUST ME, I'VE BEEN THERE. WE'RE DOING OUR BEST -- GIVE US A CHANCE.

-- BUT OTHER REACTIONS WERE LESS CLEAR --



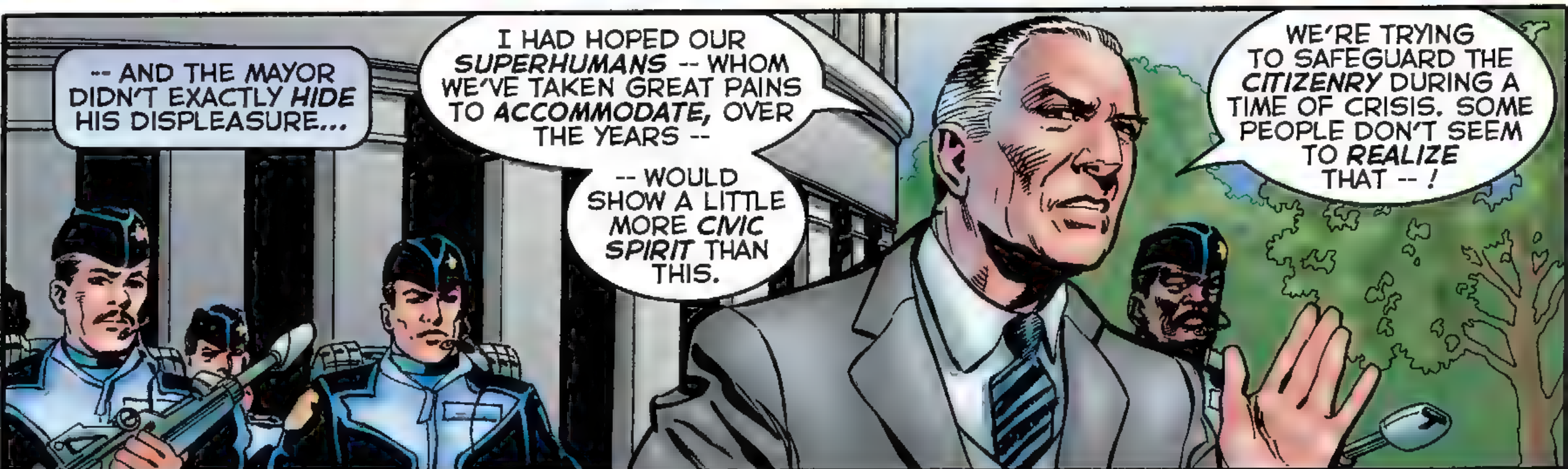
I'M WITH THE *CLOWN*. THE WHOLE THING'S *STUPID*.

YEAH? IF SO, WHY MAKE SUCH A FUSS? WHAT'S SHE *HIDING*?

SHE'S GOT A RIGHT TO *PRIVACY*!

HEY, C'MON, NOW...

AND PEOPLE ARE *DYING*! I'M NOT SURPRISED HE BACKED HER -- HE'S NOT EXACTLY *SIMON-PURE* HIMSELF, IS HE?

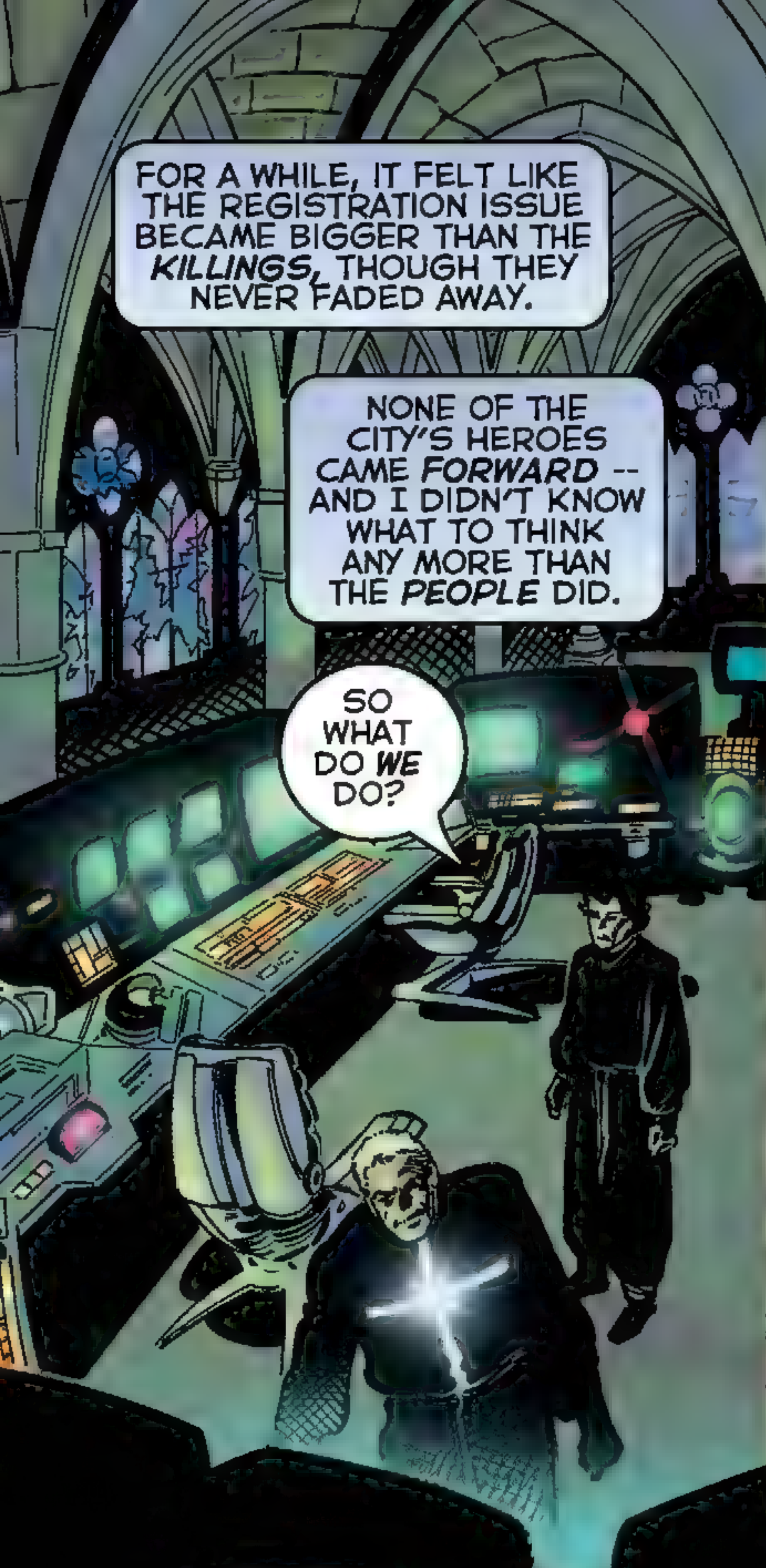


-- AND THE MAYOR DIDN'T EXACTLY *HIDE* HIS DISPLEASURE...

I HAD HOPED OUR *SUPERHUMANS* -- WHOM WE'VE TAKEN GREAT PAINS TO *ACCOMMODATE*, OVER THE YEARS --

-- WOULD SHOW A LITTLE MORE *CIVIC* SPIRIT THAN THIS.

WE'RE TRYING TO SAFEGUARD THE *CITIZENRY* DURING A TIME OF CRISIS. SOME PEOPLE DON'T SEEM TO *REALIZE* THAT -- !



FOR A WHILE, IT FELT LIKE THE REGISTRATION ISSUE BECAME BIGGER THAN THE KILLINGS, THOUGH THEY NEVER FADED AWAY.

NONE OF THE CITY'S HEROES CAME FORWARD -- AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK ANY MORE THAN THE PEOPLE DID.

SO WHAT DO WE DO?



DO? WE'RE STILL AFTER THE GUNSLINGER, AREN'T WE?

IT MAY NOT BE A SEXY CASE -- AND HIS VICTIMS AREN'T AS YOUNG OR AS INNOCENT AS MISS FELTON --

-- BUT THEY'RE STILL LIVES, AND THEY'RE STILL WORTH PROTECTING.



NO -- I MEAN ABOUT THE REGISTRATION.

DO WE -- ARE WE --



BRIAN. ARE YOU ASKING ME IF I HAVE MYSTIC POWERS?



I -- UH --

NO -- I JUST --

LET'S GO. THE NIGHT AWAITS.



-- UH --



IT TURNED OUT THAT THE MEN
THE GUNSLINGER'D RECENTLY
KILLED ALL SERVED IN THE
SAME SQUAD IN VIET NAM.

WE WENT LOOKING
FOR PEOPLE WHO
MIGHT KNOW SOMETHING
ABOUT THAT SQUAD,
AND I LEARNED ANOTHER
TRICK OF THE TRADE.

THE ONES
WHO MOST
WANT TO
AVOID YOU --



-- THOSE ARE
THE GUYS TO
TALK TO.

TRENCH...

NO! I
DON'T --

DEAD END,
TRENCH.



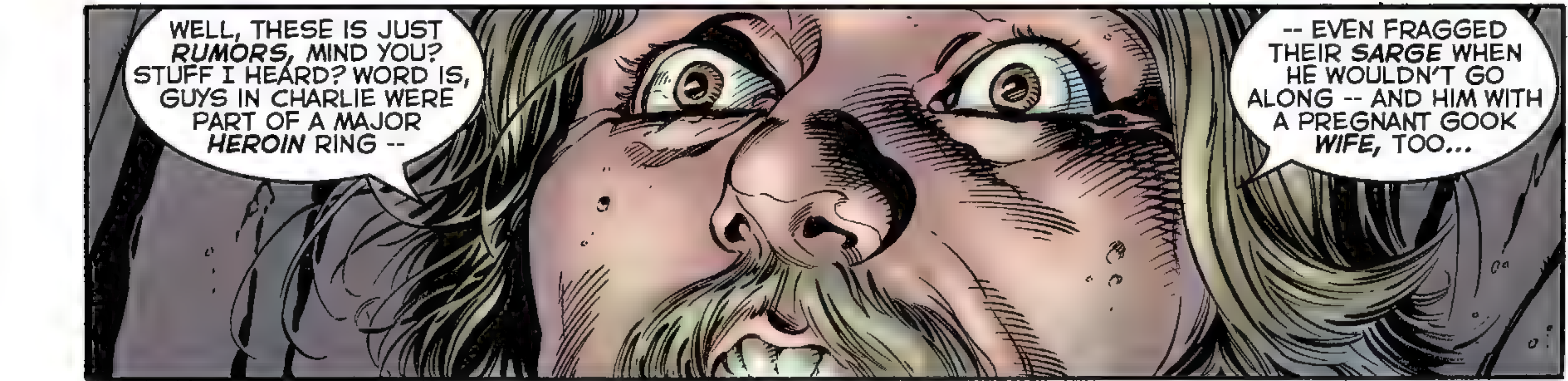
CHARLIE
COMPANY, TRENCH.
YOU WEREN'T ONE
OF THEM, BUT YOU
KNEW THEM.
TELL ME.

GEEZ, I DON'T --
I MEAN, SOME
OF THOSE GUYS,
THEY'RE BAD
NEWS! I DON'T
WANNA --

LOOK AT
ME, TRENCH. I'M
RIGHT HERE -- AND
I'M NOT EXACTLY
GOOD NEWS...



Lih --



WELL, THESE IS JUST
RUMORS, MIND YOU?
STUFF I HEARD? WORD IS,
GUYS IN CHARLIE WERE
PART OF A MAJOR
HEROIN RING --

-- EVEN FRAGGED
THEIR SARGE WHEN
HE WOULDN'T GO
ALONG -- AND HIM WITH
A PREGNANT GOOK
WIFE, TOO...



A PREGNANT WIFE.
WELL, WELL. IT LOOKS
AS IF OUR QUARRY'S
MOTIVATIONS MAY BE
PERSONAL, FOR
ONCE...

I HEARD THE NEWS, AND
I GUESS I SHOULD'VE BEEN
GLAD, BUT I KEPT HEARING
HIS VOICE IN MY HEAD, LIKE
OILED GRAVEL --

"ARE YOU ASKING
ME IF I HAVE
MYSTIC POWERS?"

BUT NOTHING MORE HAPPENED.
WE KEPT LOOKING FOR **GUN-
SLINGER**, THE SHADOW HILL
KILLER ELUDED **EVERYONE** --

-- AND THE PEOPLE
SHAKILY SUPPORTED
THEIR **HEROES** --

-- OR AT LEAST, THEY DID
UNTIL HONOR GUARD FOUGHT
THE **FRIGIANS** AND THE
THERMIANS IN ANTARCTICA.

I'LL NEVER **UNDERSTAND** IT.
THE **FRIGIANS** AND THE **THERMIANS**
HAD BEEN INTERMITTENTLY ATTACKING
US OR EACH OTHER FOR **YEARS** --

-- SOMETHING ABOUT OUR WORLD
BEING THE **INTERFACE** BETWEEN
THEIRS, SO THEY HAD TO GO THROUGH
US TO GET TO THE OTHER.

THEY WERE A **THREAT**.
NO TWO WAYS ABOUT
IT, THEY WERE A
GRAVE DANGER.

BUT IT DIDN'T
SEEM TO **MATTER**
THAT IF HONOR
GUARD HADN'T
STOPPED THEM,
THEY COULD
HAVE **SHATTERED**
THE PLANET.

ALL THAT
SEEMED TO
MATTER TO
MOST OF
ASTRO CITY,
IT SEEMED --

-- WAS THAT HONOR GUARD WASN'T **HERE**.

-- GOT THREE
KIDS! AND WHILE
SAMARITAN'S DANCING
AROUND WITH SOME
SNOWMEN, THEY
COULD --

-- THEY
EVEN **CARE?**
DON'T THEY
REALIZE --

-- GOT TO
WAIT IN **LINE** NOW?
LET 'EM GO MESS WITH
THOSE GUYS AFTER
THEY CATCH THE --

-- NOT GOING
TO **HELP**, THEY
COULD AT LEAST
COOPERATE
WITH THE
MAYOR'S --

-- **TYPICAL!**
ALL THE TIME
IN THE WORLD FOR
COSMIC CRAP, BUT
WHEN IT'S LITTLE
GIRLS DYING --

SOMETHING
SEEMED TO
CHANGE,
THEN.



IT WASN'T EVERYONE. FOR ALL THE PEOPLE WHO "GREETED" THE FIRST FAMILY ON THEIR RETURN FROM THE MIRROR GALAXY --



-- THERE WERE THOSE WHO FORMED A HUMAN CHAIN --

CATCH KILLERS, NOT HEROES!

REGISTRATION'S FOR ZEROS!

-- TO BLOCK E.A.G.L.E. TROOPERS FROM SEIZING THE SUPERHUMAN STUDIES DEPARTMENT'S RECORDS AT FBI.



BUT THE BAD STUFF WAS BAD ENOUGH... AND GETTING WORSE.

YOU WANT TO SAVE SOULS, YOU FREAKS?

SAVE SARA-LYNNE FELTON'S!



THEY -- THEY WERE CHEERING US -- ONLY WEEKS AGO!

HOW DID IT CHANGE -- SO FAST?

NOTHING'S CHANGED, BRIAN.



BOTH FACES ARE ALWAYS THERE. THE DARKER ONE STAYS SHADOWED, MOST OF THE TIME... ...BUT IT'S COME OUT INTO THE LIGHT OVER LESS THAN THIS...!

I THOUGHT IT WOULD FADE AWAY. I THOUGHT IT WOULD HAVE TO.

SOMEONE WOULD CATCH THE KILLER, AND EVERYTHING WOULD GO BACK TO NORMAL.

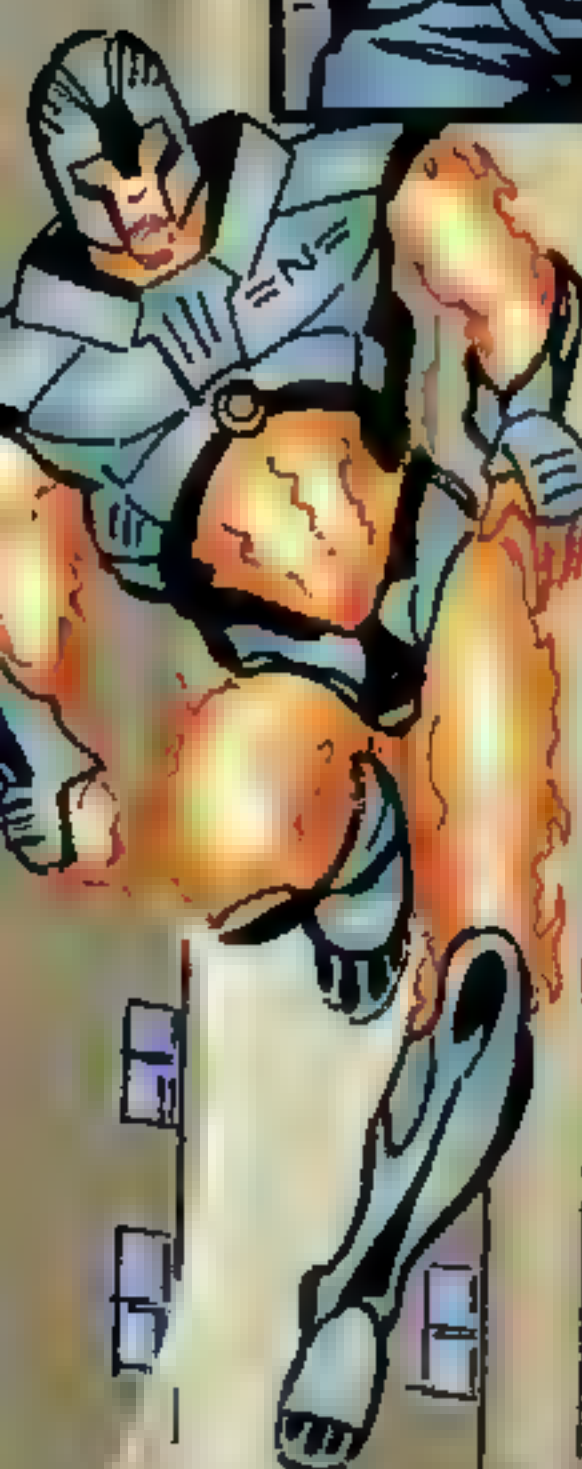


BUT IT DIDN'T. AND A MOB OF ASTRO CITIZENS DECIDED TO BURN SHADOW HILL TO THE GROUND --

WHO CARES WHO HE IS -- THIS'LL STOP HIM FOR GOOD!

WE'RE NOT TAKING THIS ANY MORE!

AND THE OTHERS CAN GET OUT -- CAN LIVE LIKE REAL PEOPLE!



THE HILLERS BARRICADED THEIR STREETS, BUT IT DIDN'T LOOK LIKE THAT WAS GOING TO STOP THE MOB --

-- NOT UNTIL HONOR GUARD AND THE IRREGULARS SHOWED UP.

RETURN TO YOUR HOMES! AND ASK YOURSELF --

-- NO MATTER HOW SCARED YOU ARE, HOW ANGRY -- DO YOU REALLY WANT TO BECOME MURDERERS?



THERE WERE GRUMBLINGS, THEN, THAT THE HEROES HAD TAKEN SIDES AGAINST THE NORMAL PEOPLE --

-- AND NOTHING SEEMED TO EASE THINGS --



WE BESEECH YOU TO TREAD WITH CAUTION -- WE LIVE HERE, AND RESPECT THE FORCES PENT UP IN THIS PLACE --

PERHAPS I'M MISUNDERSTANDING, MR. VLACEK --

I ASSURE YOU -- WE ARE AS CONCERNED IN THIS MATTER AS ANY OF YOU. BUT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND OUR WAYS --

-- AND YOU THINK YOU CAN DEFUSE A LAND MINE BY STAMPING ON IT...



-- BUT ILL-CONSIDERED ACTS COULD UNLEASH GREATER RETRIBUTION THAN YOU CAN IMAGINE -- !



-- BUT THAT SOUNDED LIKE A THREAT.



I WATCHED THE NEXT DAY, AS MORDECAI CHALK ENTERED SHADOW HILL, LOADED FOR BEAR, FULL OF ASSURANCES OF SPEEDY SUCCESS.

THE HILLERS ROLLED BACK THE BARRICADES TO LET HIM IN, AND THE CITY SIDE CHEERED LIKE THEY'D BURST FROM IT --

-- BUT THE STREETS OF SHADOW HILL STAYED SILENT. SO SILENT --

-- I COULDN'T HELP BUT SHIVER.

SO HE WENT IN. BIG DEAL! IT'S NOT LIKE HE'S DOING ANYTHING JACK-IN-THE-BOX OR QUARREL HASN'T DONE!

JUST BECAUSE HE TALKS BIG --

HE'S OFFERING PEOPLE HOPE. IT'S ONLY HUMAN NATURE TO GRASP AT IT.

WELL, I THINK IT STINKS! IF HE SUCCEEDS --

IF HE SUCCEEDS, THE THREAT WILL BE GONE. THAT'S WHAT MATTERS --

-- AND THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS.

BUT DAYS PASSED,
AND HE DIDN'T
COME OUT.

AND THE DAYS GOT
HOTTER AND HOTTER,
AND EVEN AT NIGHT --

-- IT SEEMED LIKE THE
CITY ITSELF MIGHT
EXPLODE IN FLAMES --

**BLAM
BLAM**

WHAT?!

NO --
YOU CAN'T
SAVE HIM! HE'S
A DRUG DEALER
AND A MURDERER
AND A BETRAYER!
HE HAS TO
DIE!

NO,
GUNSLINGER.
HE MAY BE A
CRIMINAL -- HE
MAY EVEN HAVE
KILLED YOUR
FATHER --

-- BUT
THE RIGHT
THING TO DO IS
EXPOSE HIM -- TO
HELP SOCIETY PUNISH
HIM FOR WHAT
HE HAS DONE.
BUT WHEN YOU
KILL --

"-- YOU BECOME
NO BETTER
THAN HE IS."

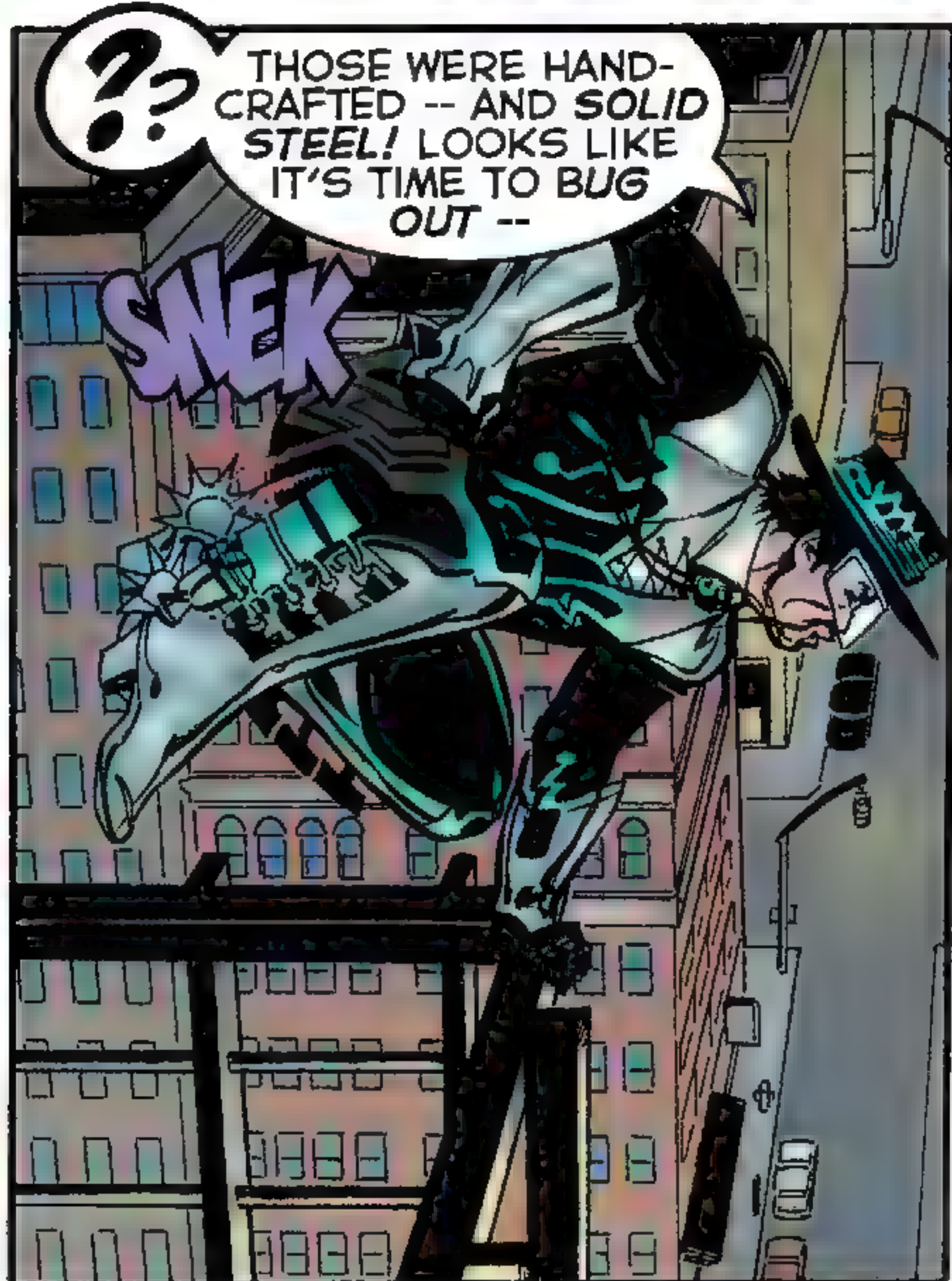
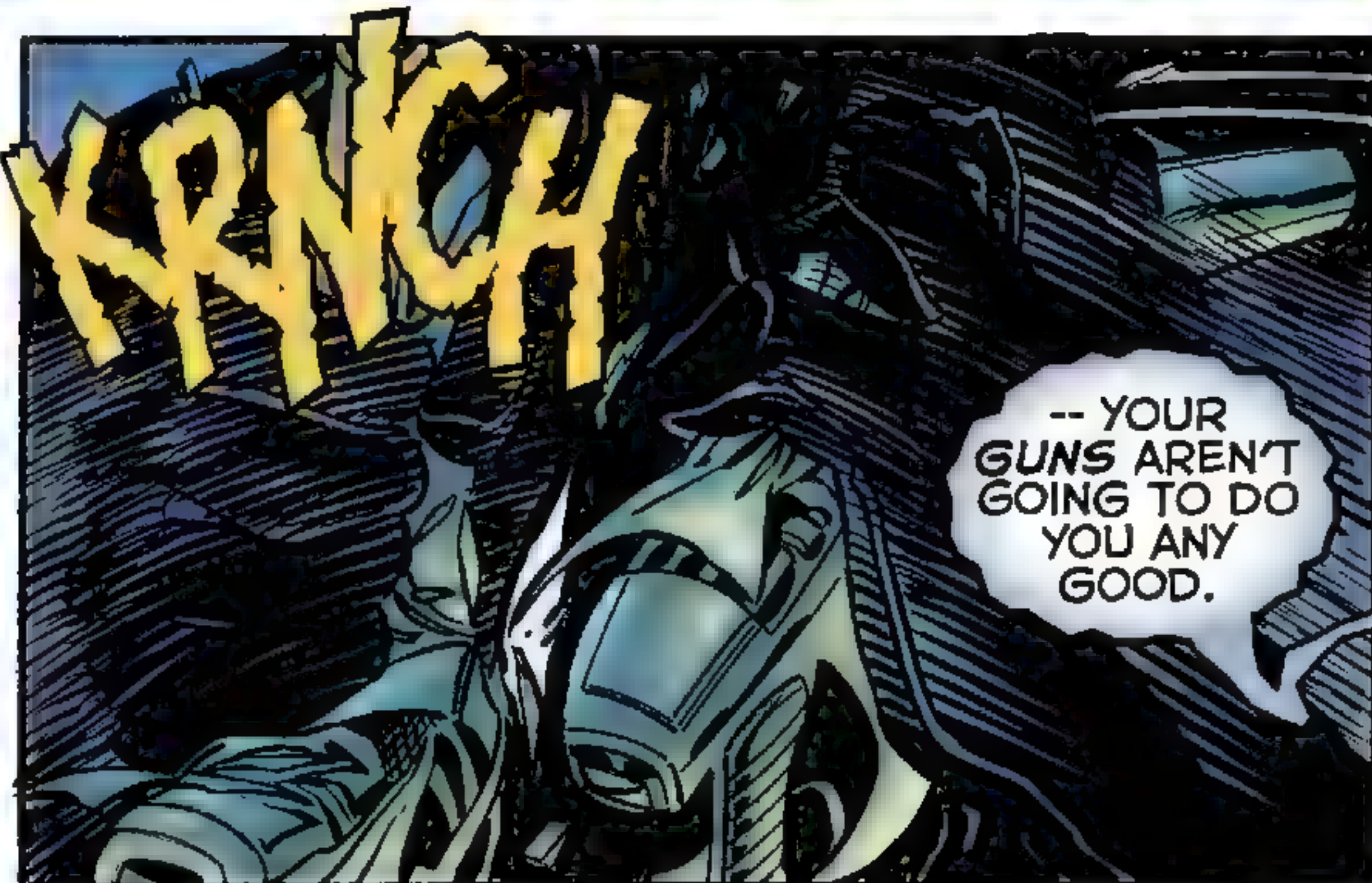
YOU KNOW,
PADRE -- YOU'RE
REALLY STARTIN'
TO ANNOY ME. I
HAVEN'T TRIED
TO KILL YOU,
YET --

RTT: 3.025

-- BUT
ONE WAY
OR THE OTHER,
YOU'RE GETTIN'
OUT OF MY
WAY!

**BLAM
BLAM**

WRAASHH

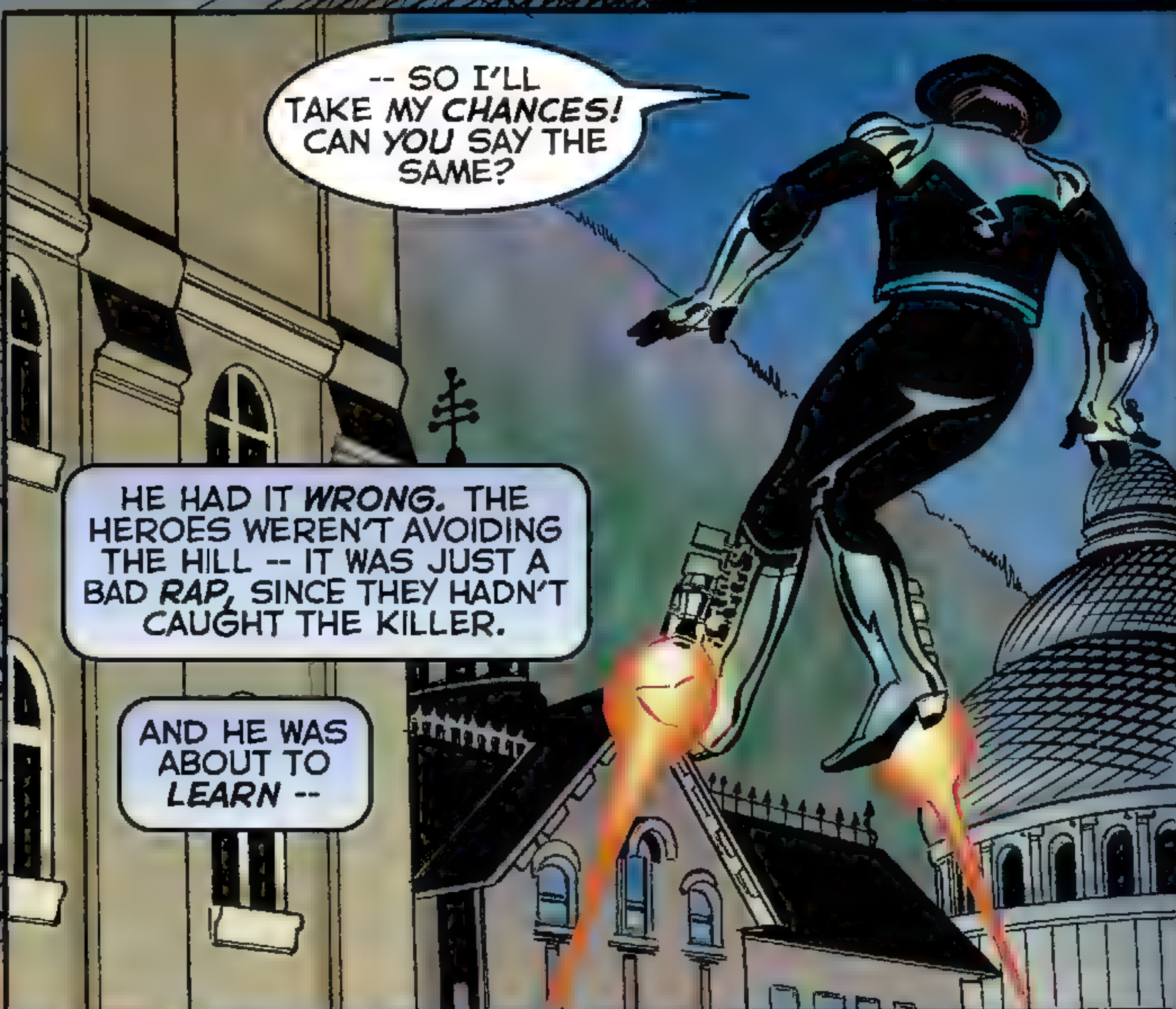




-- BUT THEY TOOK HIM FAR ENOUGH.

AH, THE BARRICADES! THAT MEANS THIS IS THE BOOGIEMAN PART OF TOWN, AIN'T IT?

THE PART YOU FOLKS ARE TOO YELLOW TO GO INTO. WELL, ME I DON'T BELIEVE IN GHOSTS --



-- SO I'LL TAKE MY CHANCES! CAN YOU SAY THE SAME?

HE HAD IT *WRONG*. THE HEROES WEREN'T AVOIDING THE HILL -- IT WAS JUST A BAD RAP, SINCE THEY HADN'T CAUGHT THE KILLER.

AND HE WAS ABOUT TO LEARN --



NO! ALTAR BOY -- STAY BACK!

HUH? BUT I'M NOT SCARED OF --

I SAID STAY BACK!



I WILL DEAL WITH HIM.



I STAYED WHERE I WAS TOLD TO -- FOR ALL OF TWO SECONDS.

IF THE CONFESSOR WANTED ME STAYING OUT OF SHADOW HILL, HE COULD TELL ME *WHY*. UNTIL THEN, FORGET IT.



I'D ALMOST CAUGHT UP TO THEM WHEN THE GUNSLINGER'S JETS SPUTTERED OUT --

-- AND --



OUT OF MY WAY!

I CAN STILL GET AWAY! I CAN LOSE MYSELF IN THESE --



NO, GUNSLINGER.



IT'S OVER.



AND THE PEOPLE --

-- THE LOOK ON THEIR FACES --



-- THEY WERE SCARED OF SOMETHING -- BACKING AWAY, CROSSING THEMSELVES. THEY WERE SCARED OF SOMETHING --

-- AND IT WASN'T THE GUNSLINGER --



AND IT ECHOED AGAIN. I TRIED TO TELL MYSELF THERE WAS NOTHING TO IT, THAT HE WAS JUST MAKING A JOKE. BUT STILL --

-- "ARE YOU ASKING ME IF I HAVE MYSTIC POWERS?"



WHAT'S GOING ON? WHY ARE THEY -- ?

I THOUGHT I TOLD YOU TO STAY BACK.

WELL, NO MATTER. WE'D BETTER GET HIM TO THE NEAREST POLICE STATION. THEY'LL BE HAPPY TO HAVE HIM IN CUSTODY.

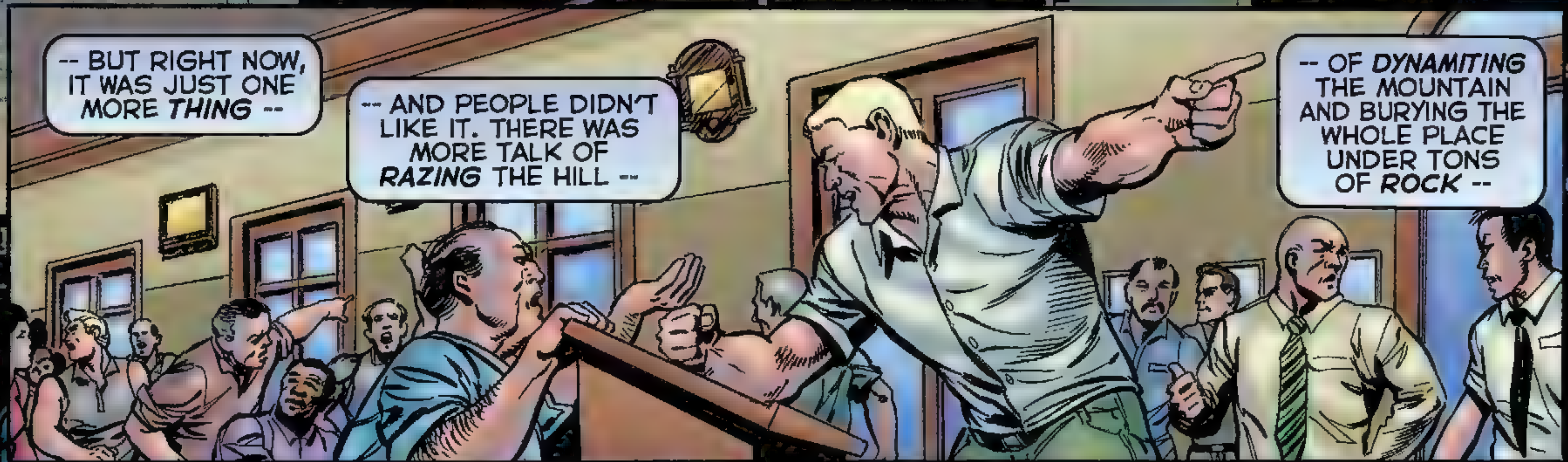
AND THAT WAS THAT. ONLY IT WASN'T.



THERE WERE FIRES ON SHADOW HILL THAT NIGHT.

FIRES IN THE DOORWAYS -- THAT PRODUCED A STRANGE, PUNGENT SMOKE THAT WAFTED TOWARD US EVEN WITH NO BREEZE.


THE OTHER KIDS SAID THIS HAD HAPPENED BEFORE, THAT IT HAPPENED EVERY NOW AND THEN --



-- BUT RIGHT NOW, IT WAS JUST ONE MORE THING --

--- AND PEOPLE DIDN'T LIKE IT. THERE WAS MORE TALK OF RAZING THE HILL --

-- OF DYNAMITING THE MOUNTAIN AND BURYING THE WHOLE PLACE UNDER TONS OF ROCK --



-- AND THE NEXT DAY,
THE MAYOR STATIONED
E.A.G.L.E. TROOPS ALL
ALONG THE BARRICADES.

NOBODY WAS DOING
ANYTHING **CRAZY**. NOT
ON **HIS** WATCH, HE
SAID. AND MORE --

THIS
ATMOSPHERE
OF **FEAR**, OF
PARANOIA --
OF NEIGHBOR
SUSPECTING
NEIGHBOR, AND
PANIC IN THE
STREETS --

-- I LAY IT
AT THE DOORSTEP
OF OUR SO-CALLED
HEROES, AND THEIR
PASSION FOR
PRIVACY, FOR
SECRECY!

WE HAVE GOTTEN USED TO **MASKS**!
TO **FACADES**, TO **STONEWALLING**!
WE'VE SOLD OUR SOULS FOR
SAFETY -- AND THIS IS THE
PRICE!

I HEREBY
SERVE NOTICE
ON THEM **ALL** -- ON
THEIR COSTUMES AND
FORTRESSES AND
THEIR DISDAIN FOR
THE **LAW**!

-- IF I HAVE
TO BRING
EVERY SINGLE
ONE OF THEM
DOWN TO
DO IT!

A FEW MONTHS
EARLIER, THAT
SPEECH WOULD
HAVE GOTTEN
HIM **IMPEACHED**.

BUT NOW, IT
GOT SCATTERED,
NERVOUS
APPLAUSE.

I COULDN'T **WORRY**
ABOUT IT. I HAD OTHER
THINGS ON MY MIND.

I SPENT THE DAY ON
THE **BIRO ISLAND FERRY**,
STARING AT THE WATER
AS WE SHUTTLED BACK
AND FORTH --

-- ENVELOPING MYSELF IN THE
SILENCE OF FAMILIES HEADED TO
VISIT **CONVICTS**, OF PEOPLE WITH
IRON BARS IN THEIR THOUGHTS.

AND DESPITE
THE **HEAT** -- ALL
I COULD FEEL
WAS **COLD**.

I STILL FELT THAT
WAY AS EVENING FELL,
AND I MADE MY WAY
TO THE VESTRY...

YOU'RE
NOT IN
COSTUME.

NO,
I'M NOT.
I'M NOT IN
COSTUME.

WELL.

SOMETHING
ON YOUR MIND,
BRIAN?

THOSE FIRES
LAST NIGHT.
THEY WERE FOR
YOU, WEREN'T
THEY?

THEY
LIT THEM
AFTER YOU
CROSSED
THEIR
BORDER.

YOU TOLD ME
TO LOOK AT
THE PATTERNS.
TO WEIGH THE
FACTS AND
SEE WHICH
DIDN'T
FIT.

YOU'RE
PRENATURALLY
STRONG AND FAST.
YOU CAN MESMERIZE
PEOPLE JUST BY
LOOKING AT THEM,
AND DISAPPEAR
INTO MIST.

-- THE PEOPLE OF
SHADOW HILL ARE
SCARED OF
YOU.

I DIDN'T
WANT TO BELIEVE
IT. I TRIED TO TELL
MYSELF IT'S NOT
TRUE. BUT WITH ALL
THESE KILLINGS --
ALL THIS MYSTERY,
AND FEAR --

WHAT
DO YOU
MEAN?

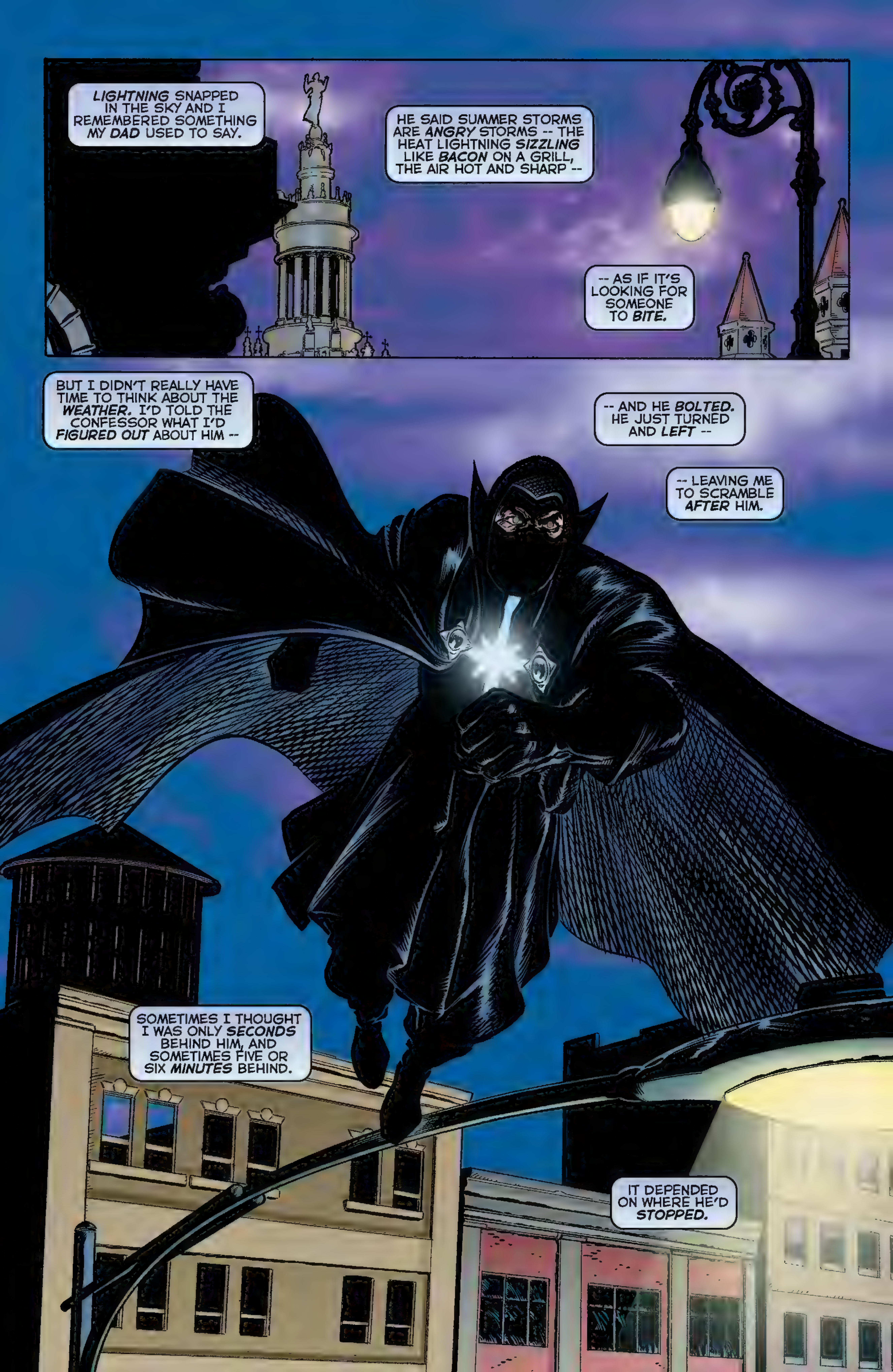
YOU NEVER
COME OUT IN
THE DAY. BULLETS
PASS THROUGH YOU.
AND THE PEOPLE
OF SHADOW HILL --

-- I JUST
CAN'T IGONRE
IT ANY MORE.









LIGHTNING SNAPPED
IN THE SKY AND I
REMEMBERED SOMETHING
MY DAD USED TO SAY.

HE SAID SUMMER STORMS
ARE ANGRY STORMS -- THE
HEAT LIGHTNING SIZZLING
LIKE BACON ON A GRILL,
THE AIR HOT AND SHARP --

-- AS IF IT'S
LOOKING FOR
SOMEONE
TO BITE.

BUT I DIDN'T REALLY HAVE
TIME TO THINK ABOUT THE
WEATHER. I'D TOLD THE
CONFESSOR WHAT I'D
FIGURED OUT ABOUT HIM --

-- AND HE BOLTED.
HE JUST TURNED
AND LEFT --

-- LEAVING ME
TO SCRAMBLE
AFTER HIM.

SOMETIMES I THOUGHT
I WAS ONLY SECONDS
BEHIND HIM, AND
SOMETIMES FIVE OR
SIX MINUTES BEHIND.

IT DEPENDED
ON WHERE HE'D
STOPPED.



IT DIDN'T
HELP MUCH.

ONCE THEY WERE ALL
DOWN, ALL *UNCONSCIOUS*,
HE VISIBLY SHUDDERED,
LOOKING AT THEM, AND
TURNED TO GO --

CONFESSOR!
WAIT!

AND THAT'S WHEN
I CAUGHT UP.

CONFESSOR.
WE HAVE TO
TALK.

TALK?

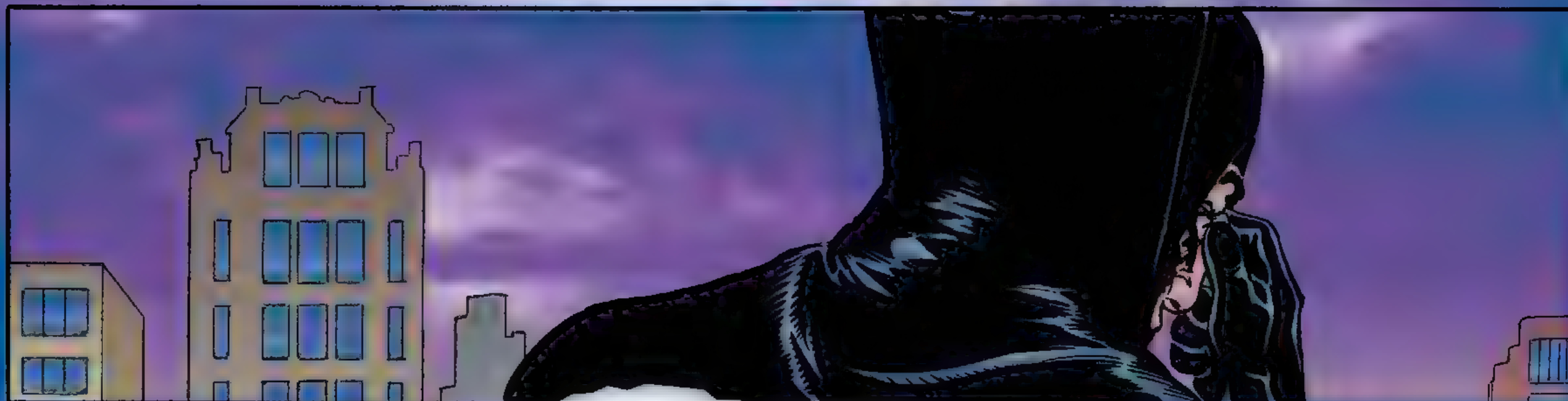
LOOK AT
ME, BOY!
LOOK AT
ME!

YOU DEDUCED
IT! YOU PUT THE
PATTERN TOGETHER!
YOU WERE RIGHT!
BUT YOU DON'T TALK
TO ONE SUCH
AS I!

YOU
FEAR US!
YOU SHUN
US!

YOU
HUNT US DOWN
LIKE THE *BLACK*,
THRICE-DAMNED
MONSTERS
WE **ARE!**

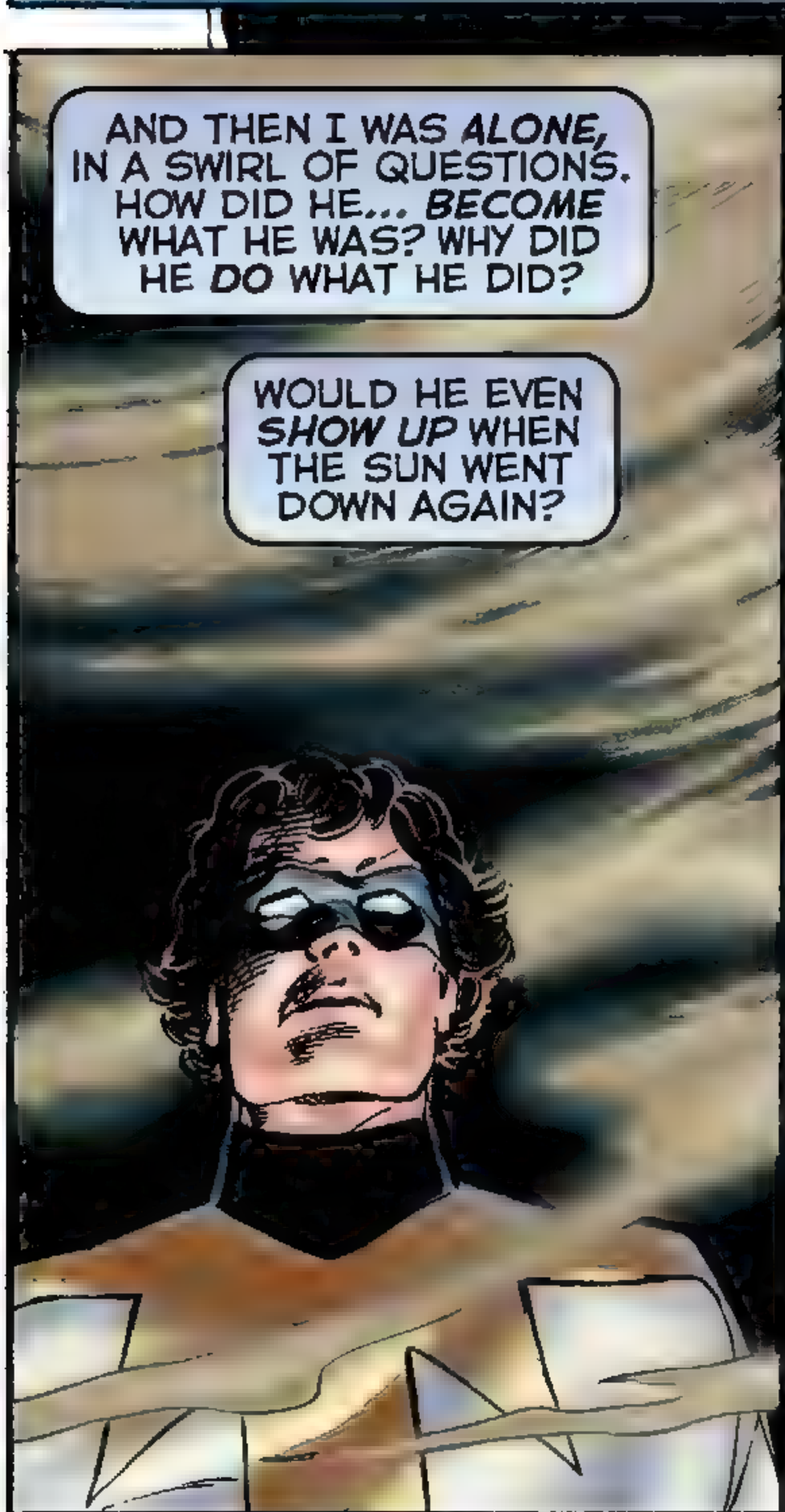




YOU'VE
EARNED IT. BUT
IT'S ALMOST DAWN,
AND I HAVE
TO GO. WE'LL TALK
TONIGHT.

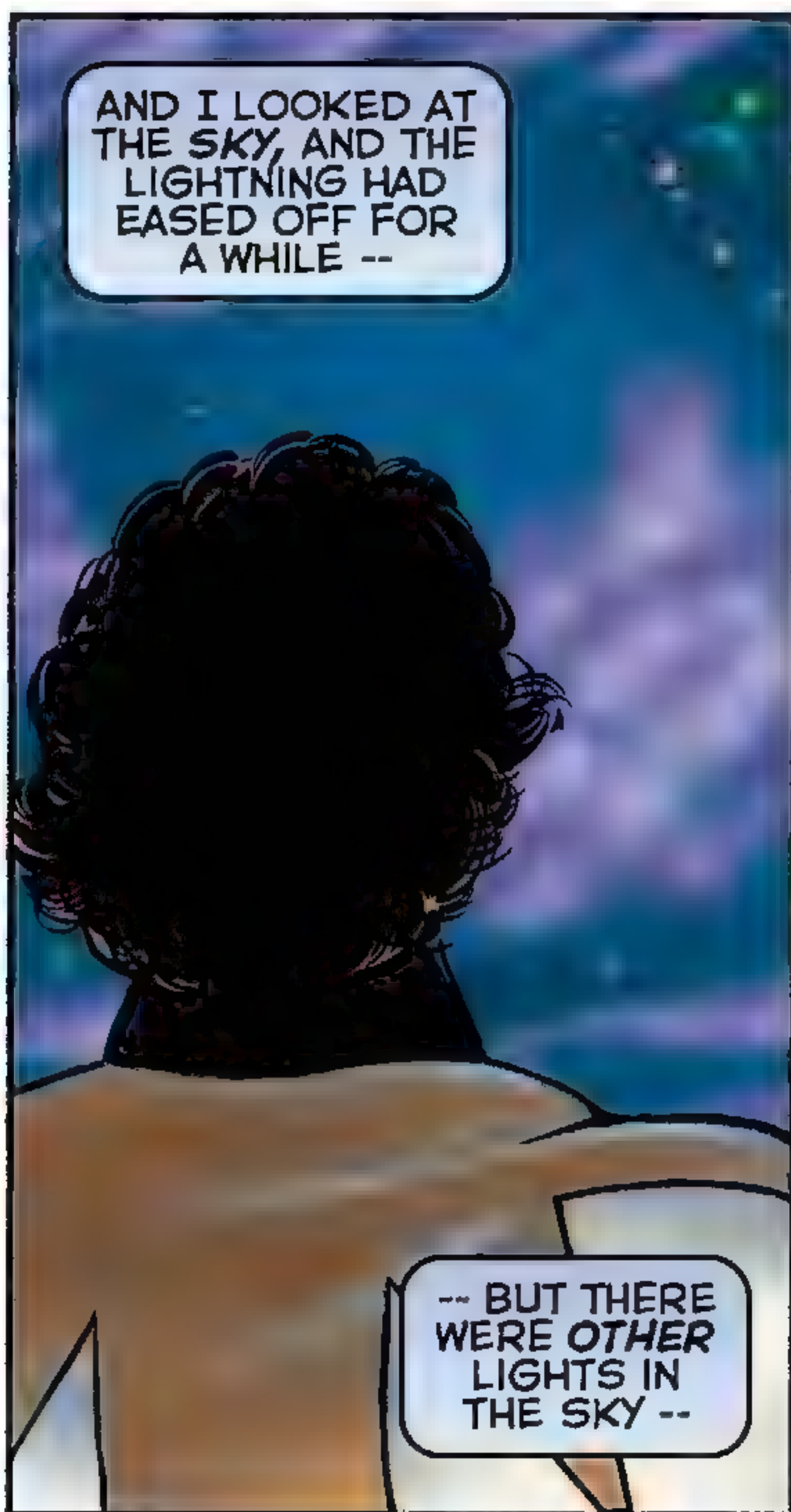
AND FOR THE
FIRST TIME --

-- I SAW HIM
VANISH.



AND THEN I WAS ALONE,
IN A SWIRL OF QUESTIONS.
HOW DID HE... *BECOME*
WHAT HE WAS? WHY DID
HE DO WHAT HE DID?

WOULD HE EVEN
SHOW UP WHEN
THE SUN WENT
DOWN AGAIN?



AND I LOOKED AT
THE SKY, AND THE
LIGHTNING HAD
EASED OFF FOR
A WHILE --

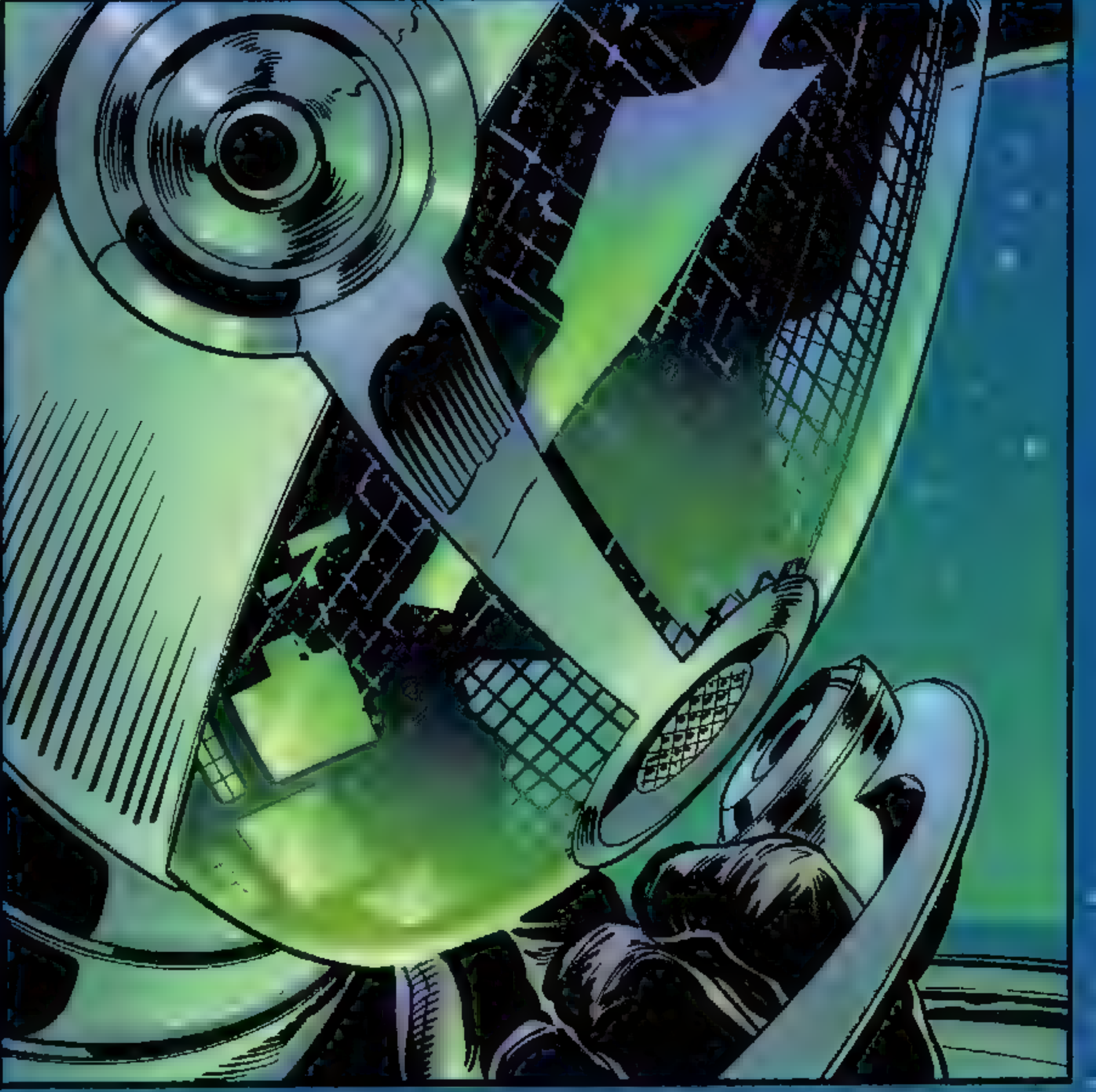
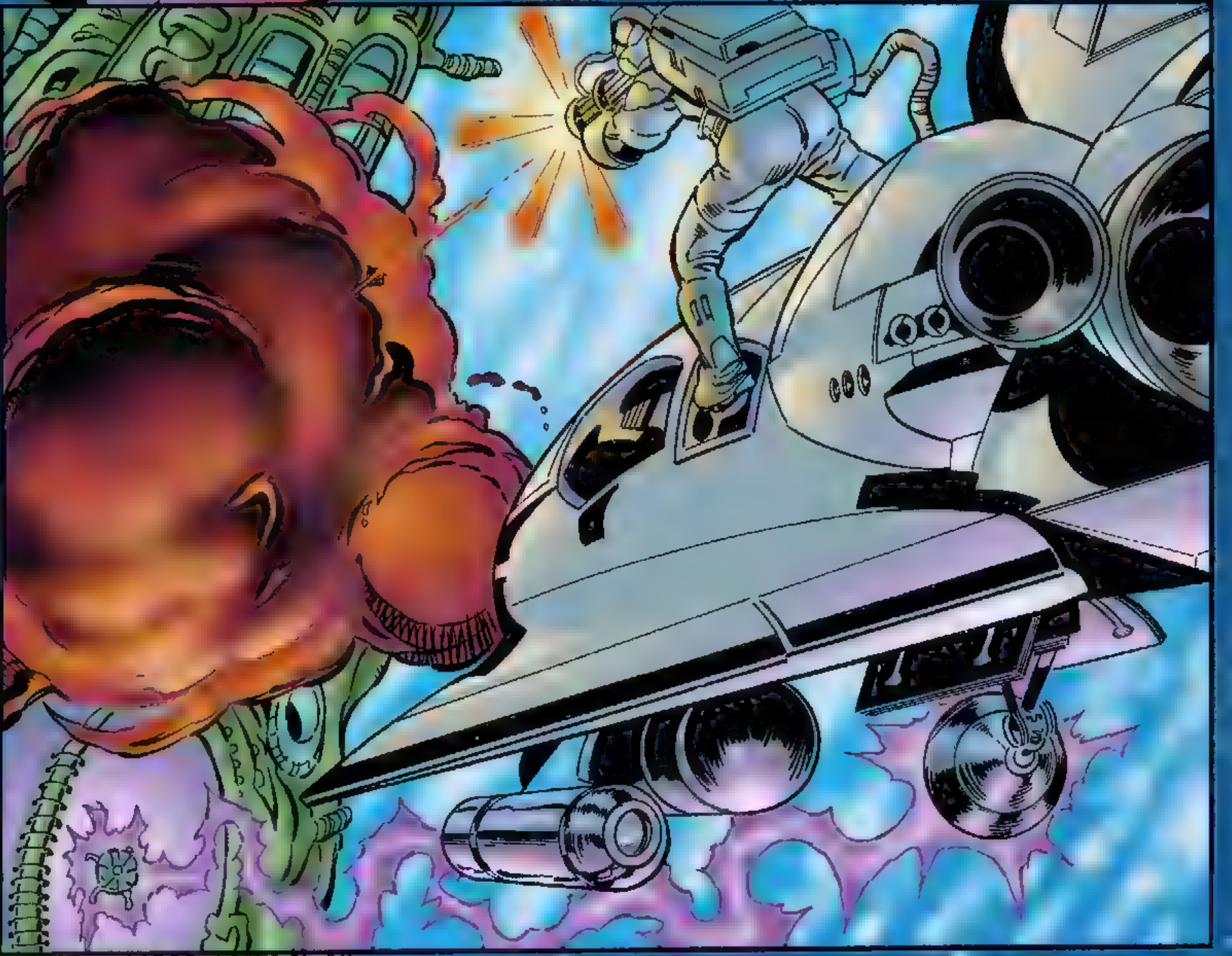
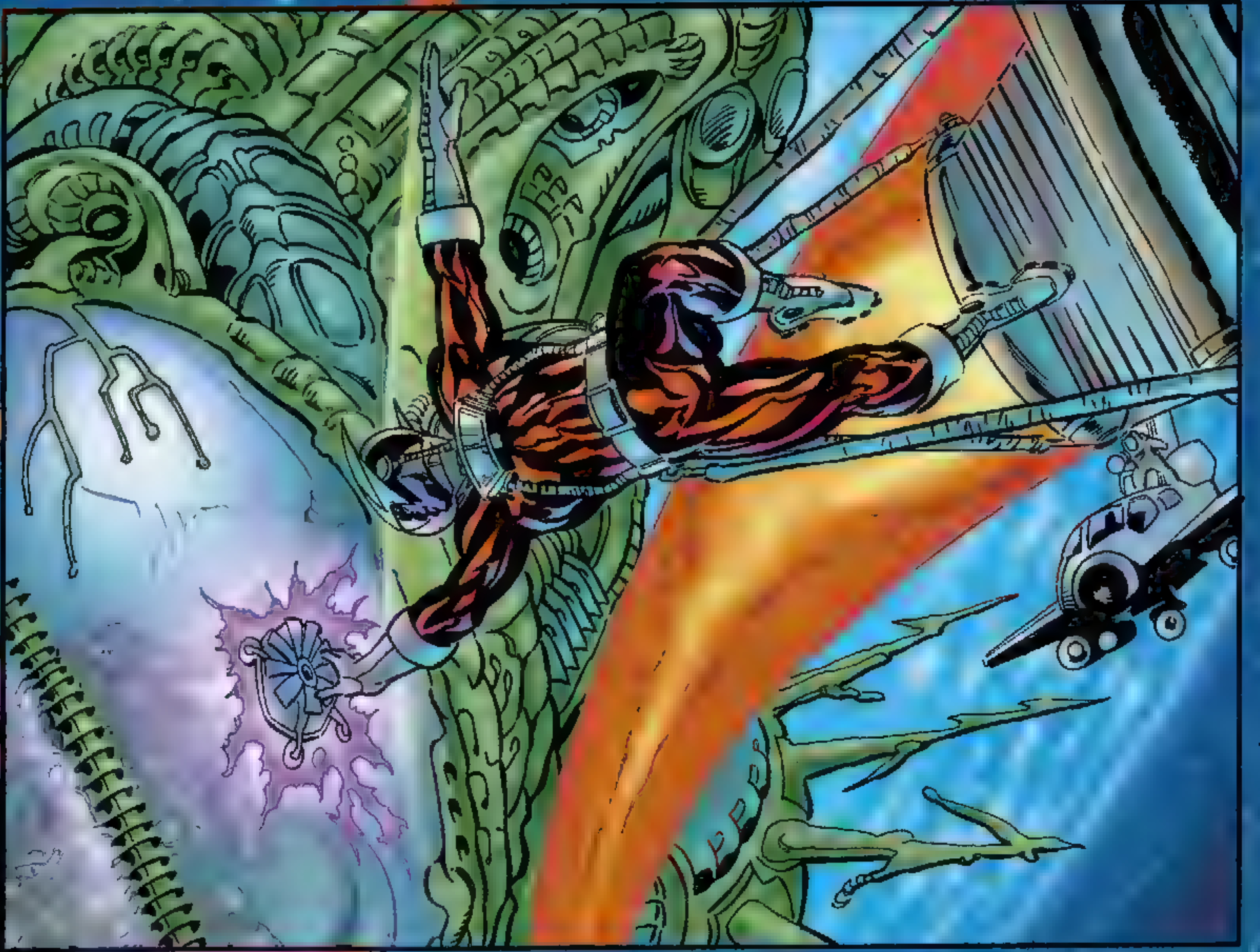
-- BUT THERE
WERE OTHER
LIGHTS IN
THE SKY --

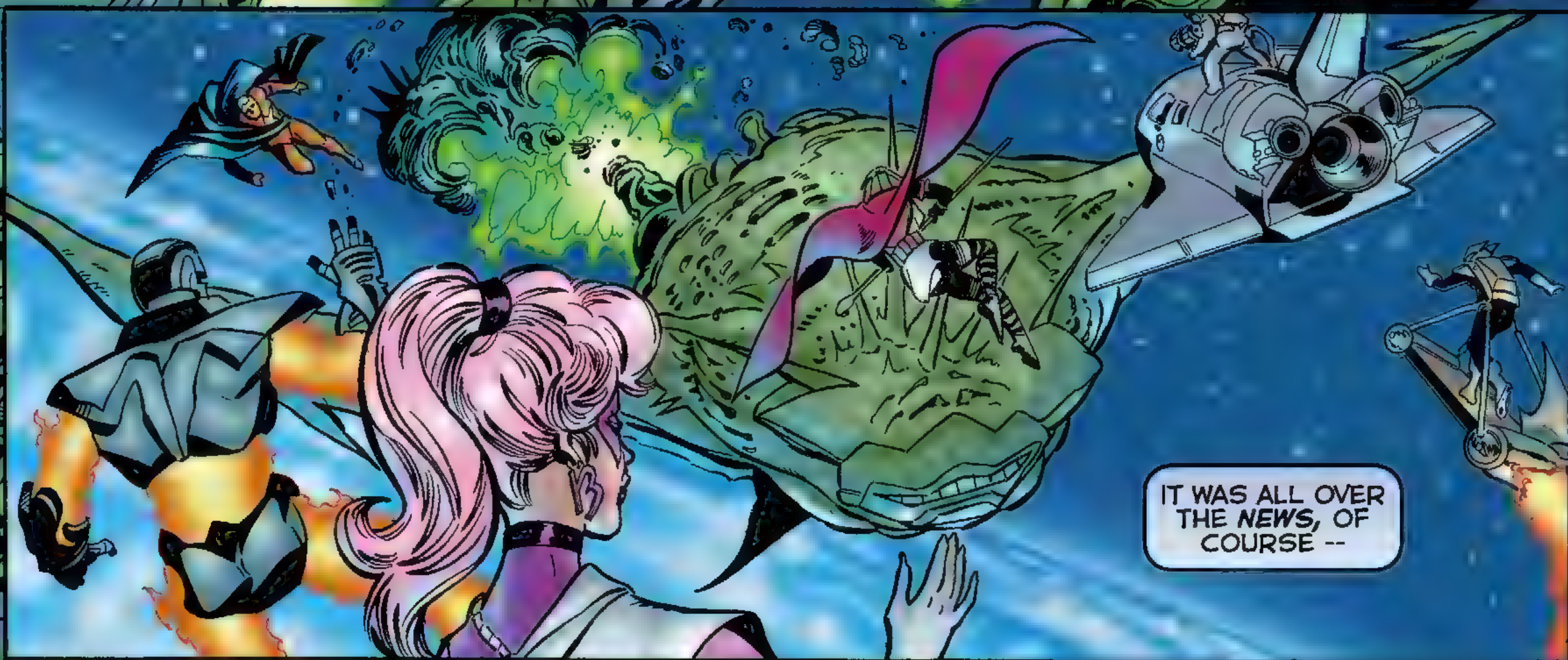
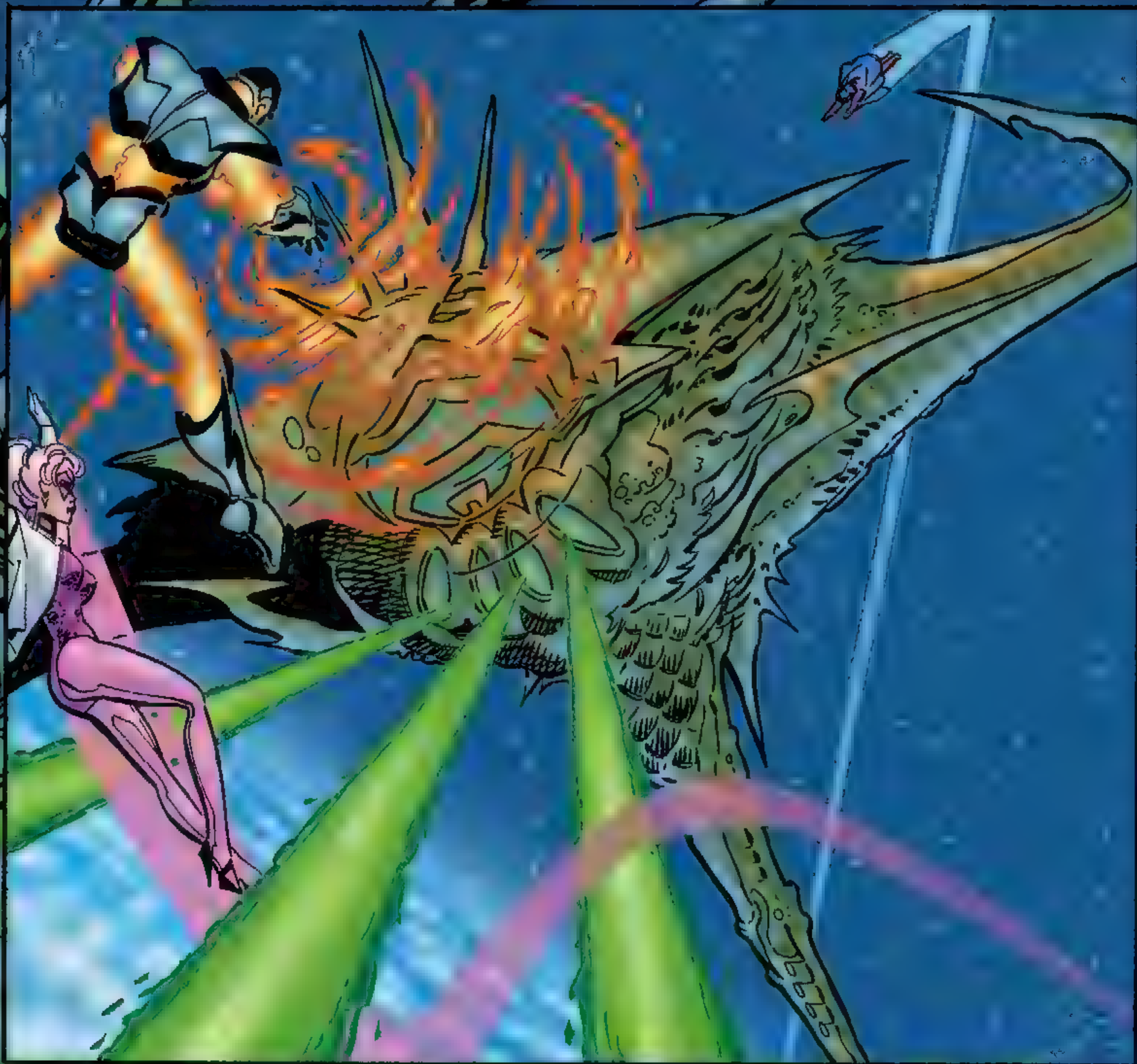


-- AND I
COULDN'T
HELP BUT
WONDER --

-- WHAT ELSE
WAS GOING ON
TONIGHT?

EVE OF THE STORM





-- SPOKESMEN FOR HONOR GUARD SAY THE SHIP APPEARS TO BE A SCOUT SHIP, AND OPENED FIRE WHEN THEY INVESTIGATED --

-- BUT THAT AT THIS POINT THEY DO NOT KNOW WHERE IT CAME FROM, OR WHETHER OTHER SHIPS ARE OUT THERE.



THIS HAS TOUCHED OFF ANOTHER CONFRONTATION BETWEEN THE MAYOR'S OFFICE AND THE SUPERHEROES --

-- AS THE MAYOR DIRECTED HONOR GUARD TO TURN THE SHIP AND ITS OCCUPANTS OVER TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT --

" -- AND THE TEAM DEMURRED -- "

SURE, WE'LL TURN IT OVER, BUT WE'VE GOT TO FIND SOME STUFF OUT FIRST. WE'RE HOPING TO CONTACT STARWOMAN --

-- FIND OUT IF HER PEOPLE KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THESE GUYS.

QUARREL OF HONOR GUARD

" -- LEADING TO AN ANGRY RESPONSE FROM THE MAYOR -- "

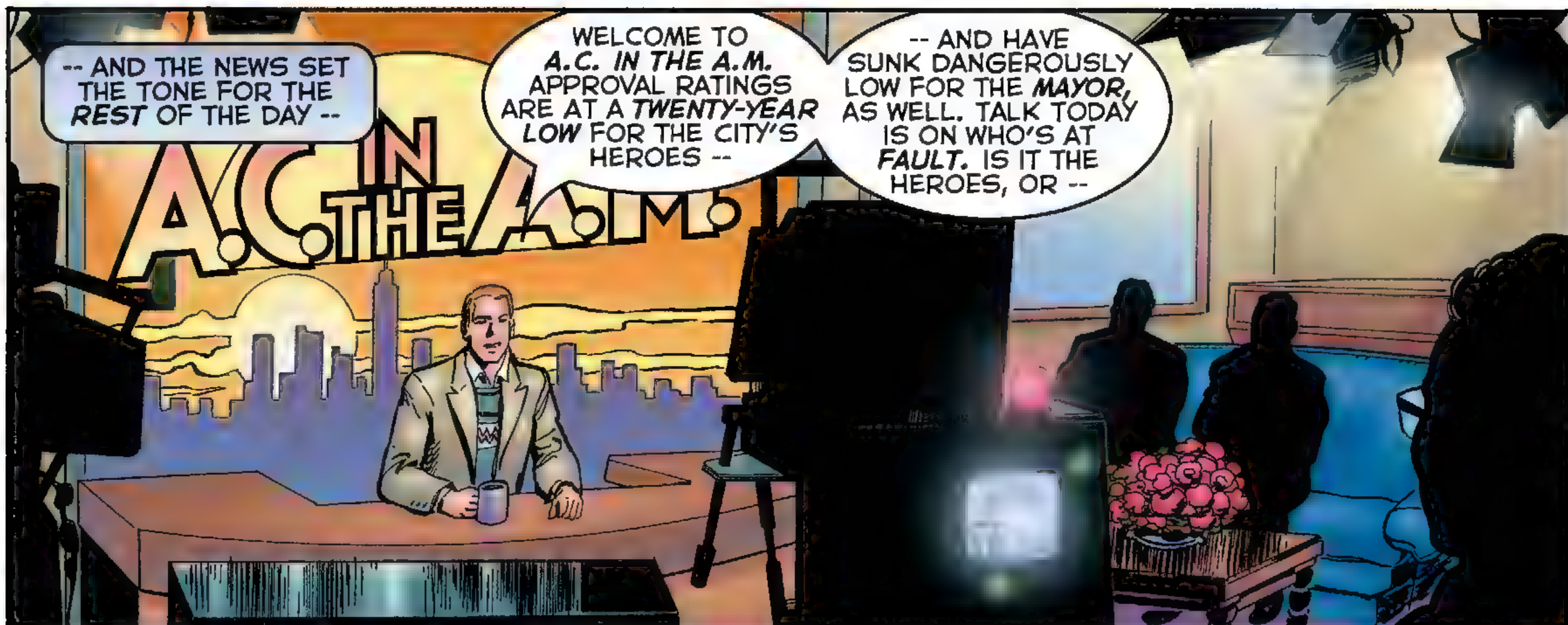
HONOR GUARD -- AND ALL THE SO-CALLED "HEROES" -- HAVE TO LEARN THAT THIS PLANET IS NOT THEIR PRIVATE PLAYGROUND.

THEIR FLOUTING AUTHORITY LIKE THIS SHOWS CONTEMPT AND ARROGANCE -- AND IT WILL NOT BE TOLERATED!

IN OTHER NEWS, THERE IS STILL NO WORD FROM PROFESSIONAL MONSTER-HUNTER MORDECAI CHALK --

-- WHO ENTERED SHADOW HILL DAYS AGO IN SEARCH OF THE SERIAL KILLER PLAGUING AREA NEIGHBORHOODS.

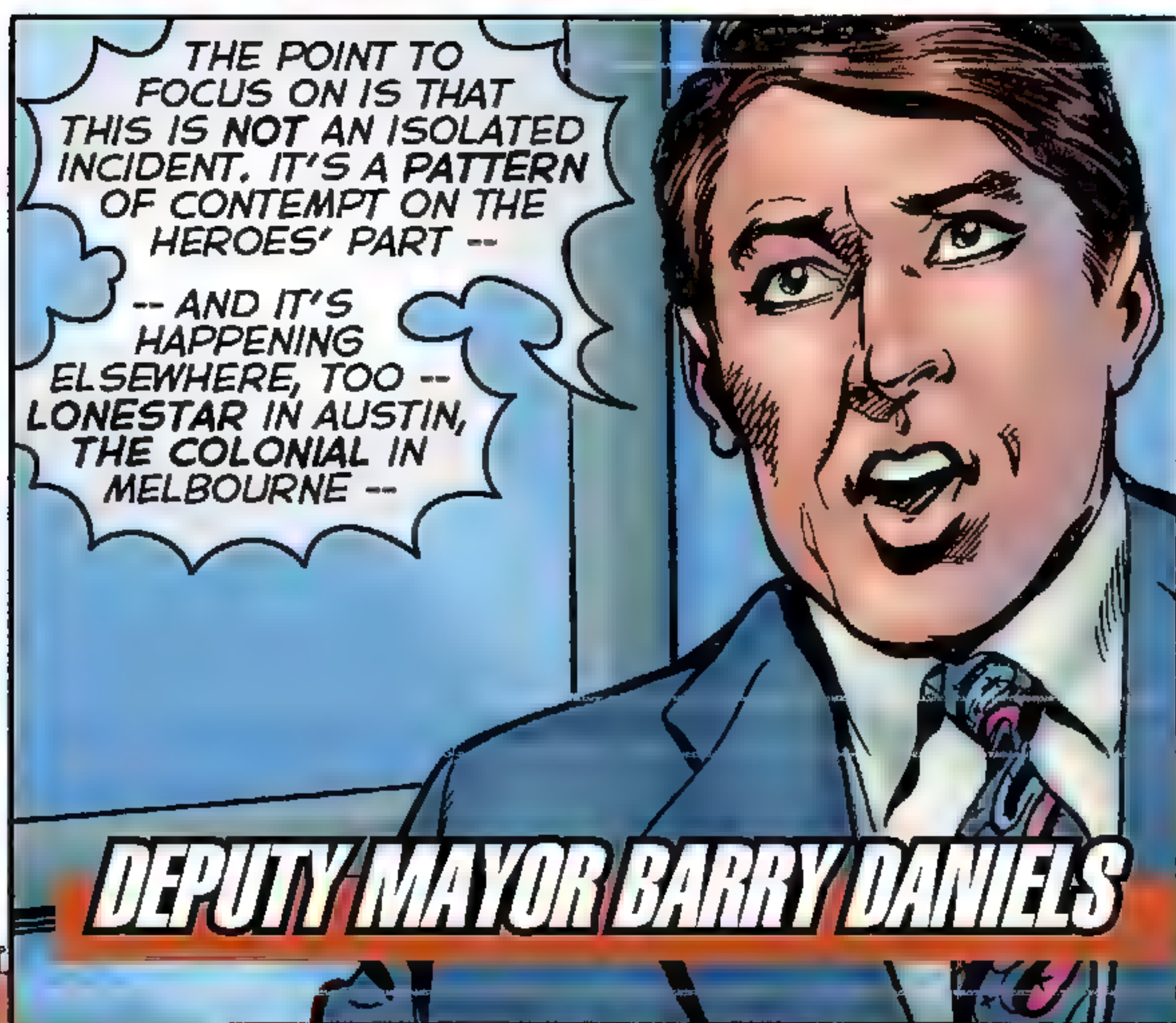
CHALK HAD PROMISED TO MAKE REGULAR REPORTS, BUT HIS LAST CONTACT CAME TUESDAY, AND WAS DROWNED OUT BY STATIC...



-- AND THE NEWS SET THE TONE FOR THE REST OF THE DAY --

WELCOME TO A.C. IN THE A.M. APPROVAL RATINGS ARE AT A TWENTY-YEAR LOW FOR THE CITY'S HEROES --

-- AND HAVE SUNK DANGEROUSLY LOW FOR THE MAYOR, AS WELL. TALK TODAY IS ON WHO'S AT FAULT. IS IT THE HEROES, OR --



THE POINT TO FOCUS ON IS THAT THIS IS NOT AN ISOLATED INCIDENT. IT'S A PATTERN OF CONTEMPT ON THE HEROES' PART --

-- AND IT'S HAPPENING ELSEWHERE, TOO -- LONESTAR IN AUSTIN, THE COLONIAL IN MELBOURNE --

DEPUTY MAYOR BARRY DANIELS



-- SUPERHEROES. ARE THEY PROTECTING US -- OR RULING US?

DISCUSSING THIS TODAY WILL BE REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE ACLU, THE MAYOR'S OFFICE, AND THE ASTRO CITY IRREGULARS --



-- RUSH HOUR RAMBLE, TAKING YOUR CALLS ON THE CRISIS --

-- RIGHT AFTER OUR TRAFFIC REPORT GIVES THE BAD NEWS TO EVERYONE STUCK ON THE SHUSTER EXPRESSWAY. BUT FIRST --

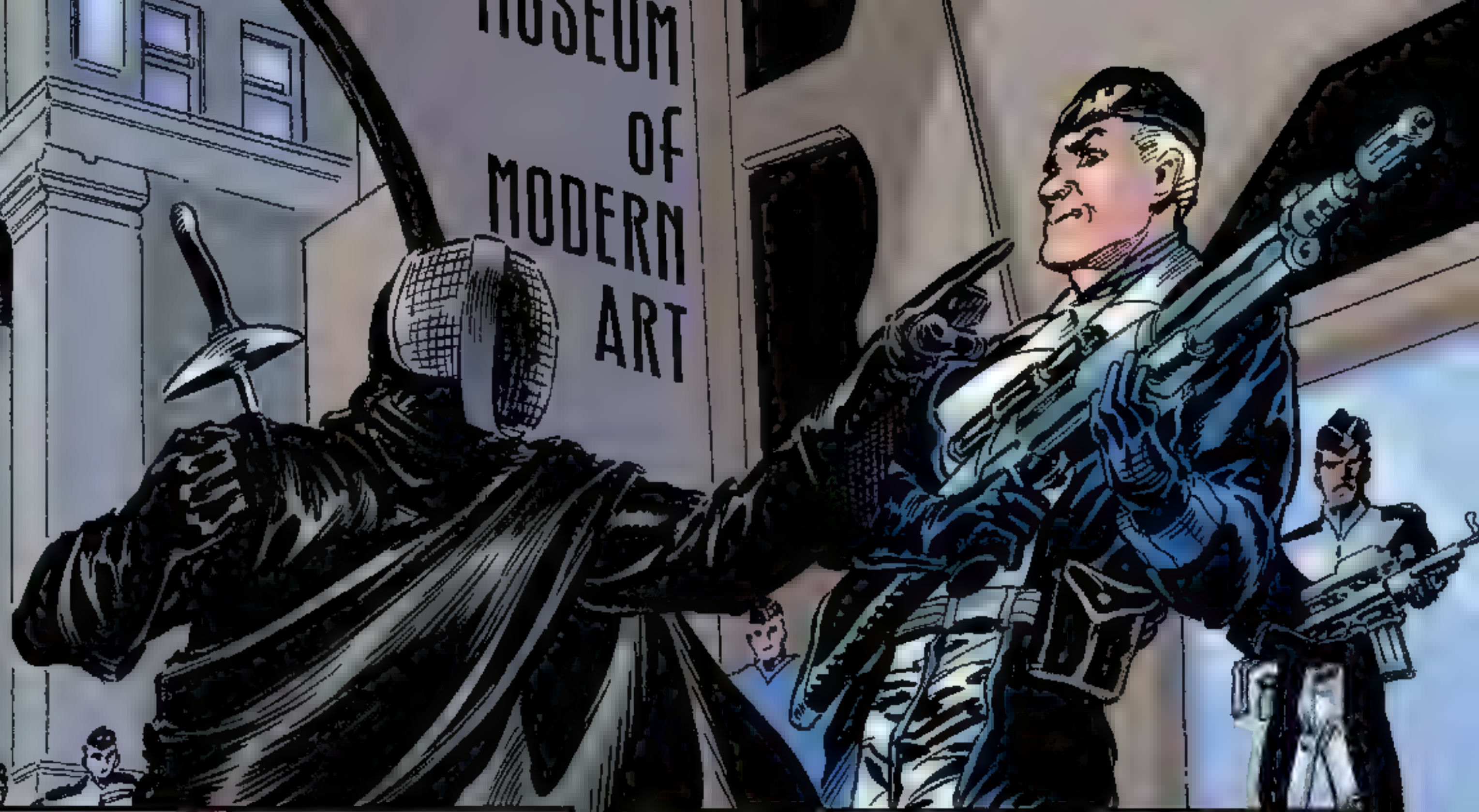


-- JUST RECEIVED THIS BULLETIN, DETAILING A CONFRONTATION AT THE ASTRO CITY MUSEUM OF MODERN HISTORY --

-- BETWEEN E.A.G.L.E. TROOPS AND HONOR GUARD'S LEADER, THE BLACK RAPIER.

"THE RAPIER CAME TO THE MUSEUM TO USE THE CONTACT MATRIX DISPLAYED THERE, TO CALL EX-GUARD-MEMBER STARWOMAN --

"-- BUT WAS PREVENTED FROM ENTERING BY E.A.G.L.E. TROOPS. THERE WAS NO VIOLENCE, BUT WITNESSES SAY --"



I DON'T LIKE THIS. THEY'RE SO POWERFUL -- AND IT SEEMS LIKE EVERY DAY THERE'S MORE OF 'EM.

IF WE CAN'T CONTROL THEM...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, CONTROL THEM?



THEY'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING WRONG! IT'S THE MAYOR WHO'S --

YOU'RE YOUNG. YOU DON'T REMEMBER THE SEVENTIES.

HUH? WHAT DOES THAT --

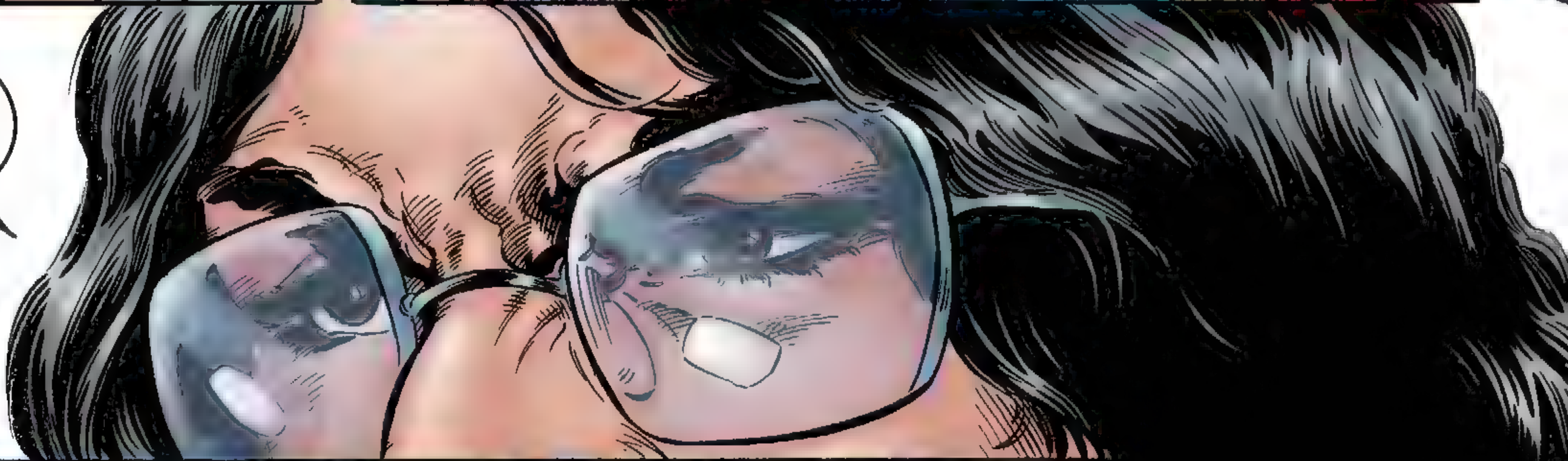


IF YOU REMEMBERED, YOU WOULDN'T BE SO READY TO PRAISE -- SO TRUSTING OF ANYONE IN A CAPE.

DO SOME READING. TALK TO SOME PEOPLE. IT WAS A BAD TIME, BACK THEN --

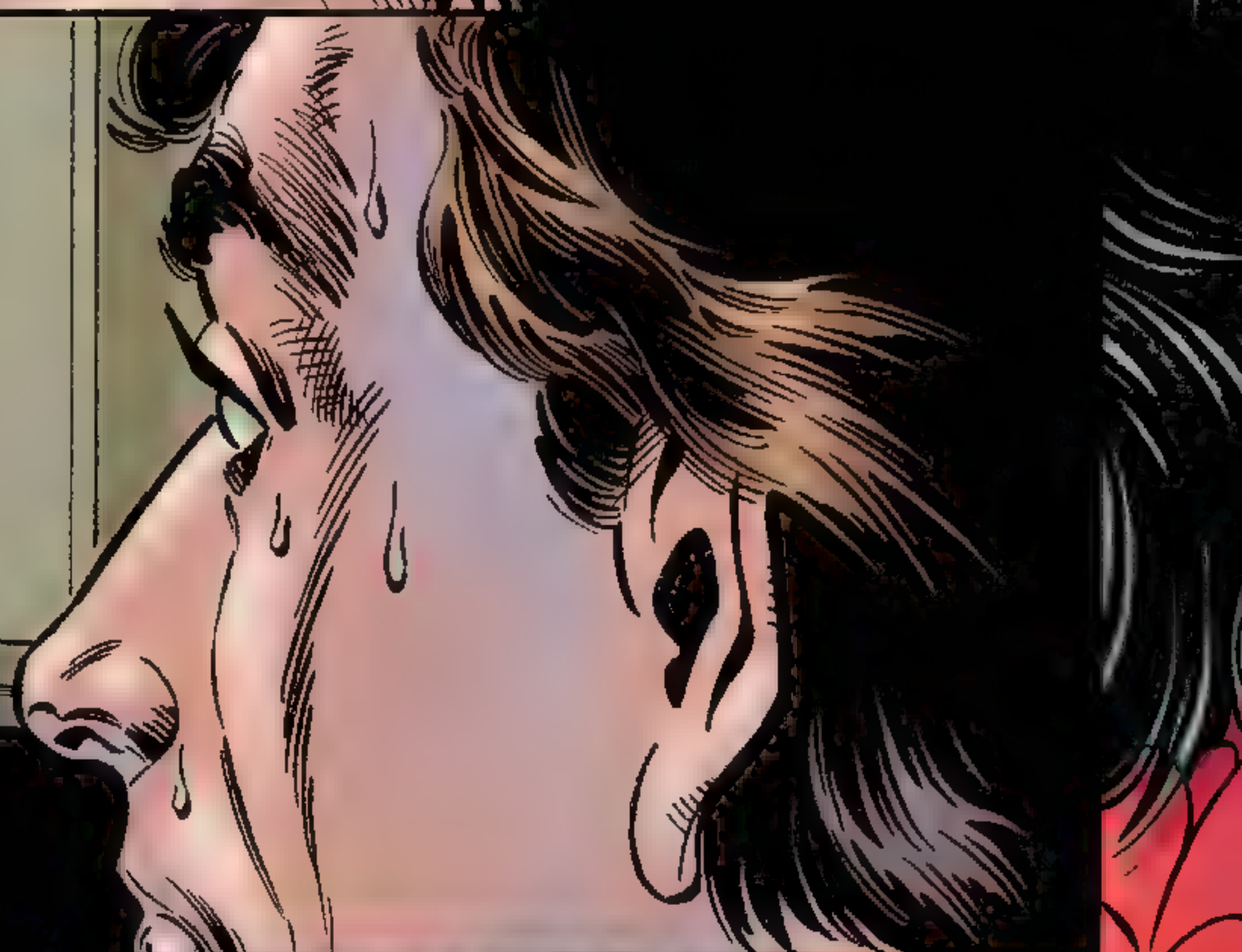
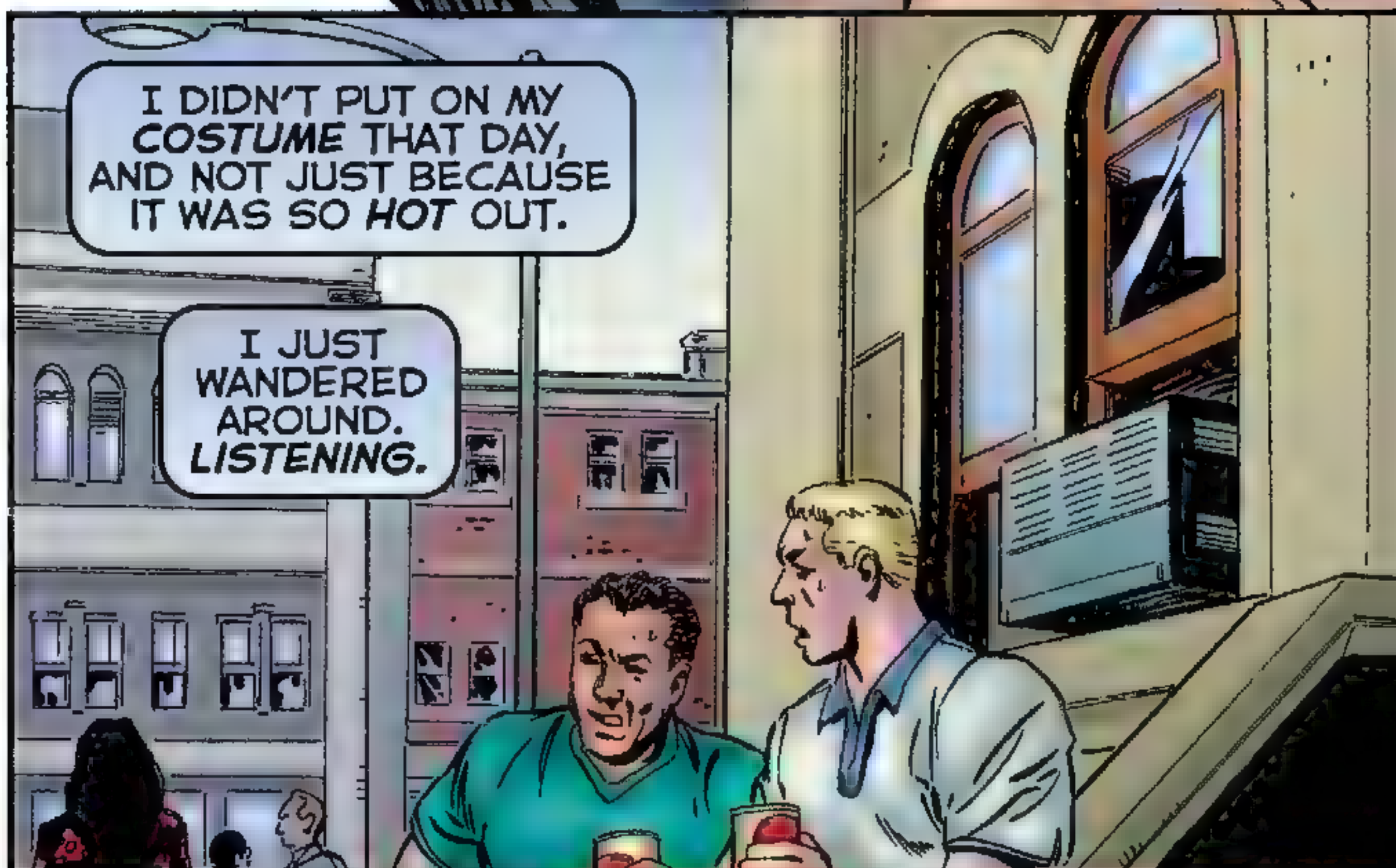


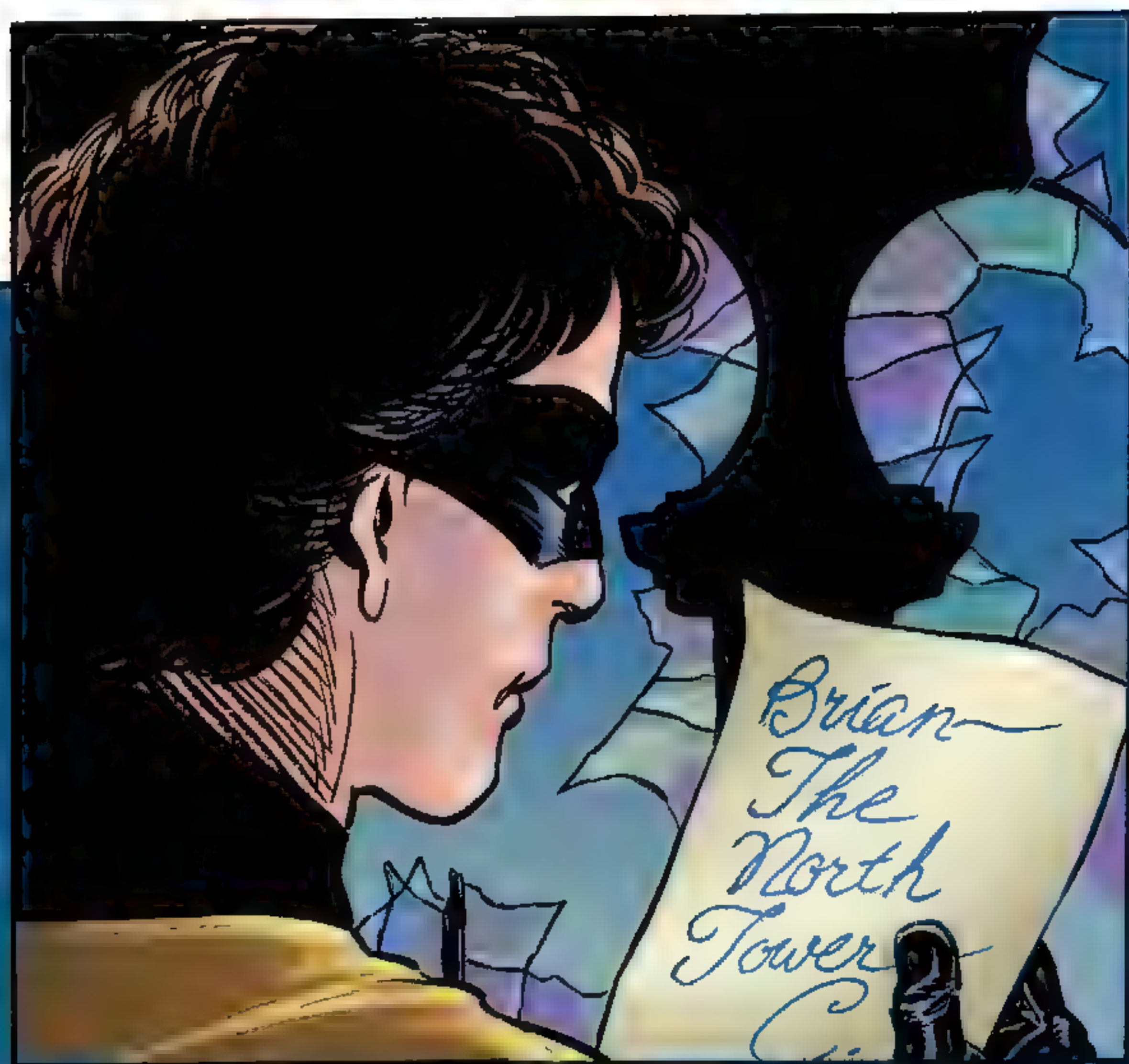
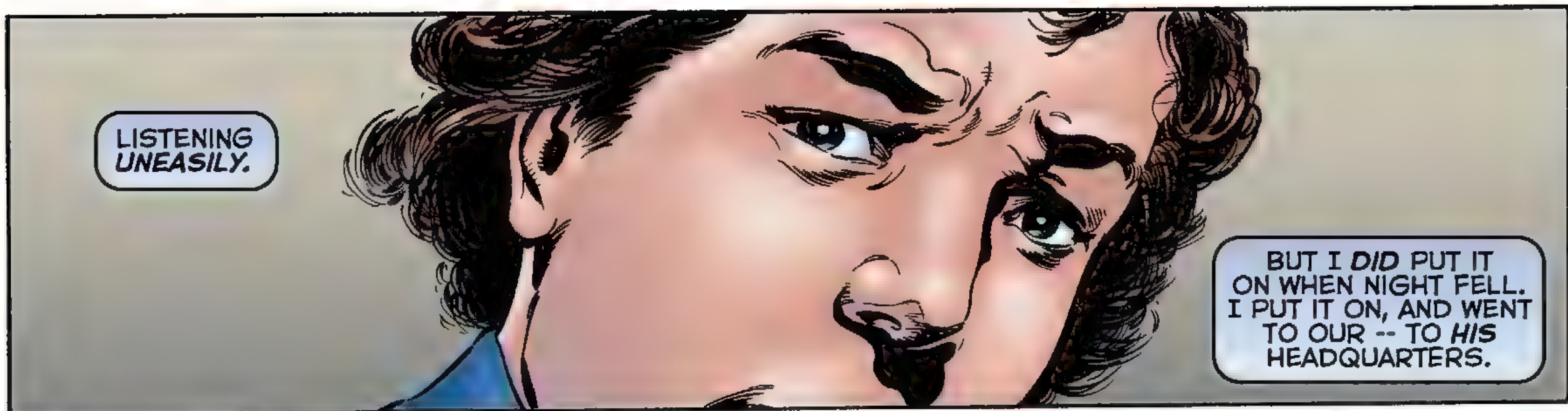
-- AND IT MAY BE STARTING AGAIN...



I DIDN'T PUT ON MY COSTUME THAT DAY, AND NOT JUST BECAUSE IT WAS SO HOT OUT.

I JUST WANDERED AROUND. LISTENING.







DO YOU EVER
THINK ABOUT THEM,
OUT THERE? ALL THOSE
PEOPLE, IN THEIR
LITTLE APARTMENTS,
IN THEIR
HOUSES? ALL THOSE
DREAMS, ALL
THOSE HOPES, ALL
PACKED INTO THIS
ONE CITY. SO
CONCENTRATED, SO
ENTANGLED --



NO -- NO,
I SUPPOSE
YOU DON'T.

SO. WHAT
WOULD YOU
LIKE TO
KNOW?

I DIDN'T
KNOW WHERE
TO START.

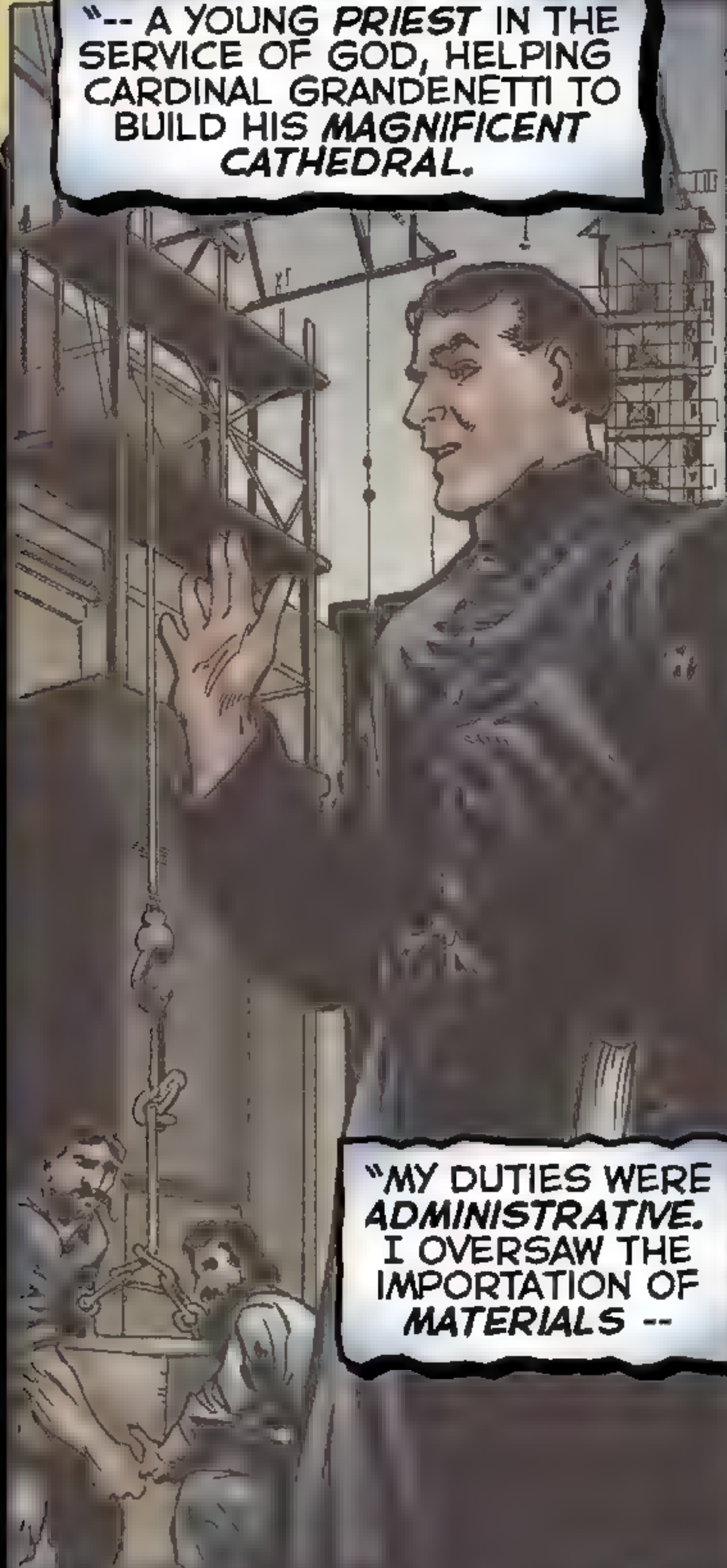


I,
UH --
I --

WHO
ARE
YOU?



MY NAME IS
JEREMIAH
PARRISH.
I CAME
TO THIS CITY
IN 1869 --



-- A YOUNG PRIEST IN THE
SERVICE OF GOD, HELPING
CARDINAL GRANDENETTI TO
BUILD HIS MAGNIFICENT
CATHEDRAL.

MY DUTIES WERE
ADMINISTRATIVE.
I OVERSAW THE
IMPORTATION OF
MATERIALS --



-- AND DEALT WITH
FOREMEN AND LABORERS,
MANY OF WHOM HAD BEEN
BROUGHT HERE FROM
EASTERN EUROPE --

-- AND WHO SETTLED
THE FOOTHILLS OF
MOUNT KIRBY, CREATING
WHAT WOULD COME TO BE
KNOWN AS SHADOW HILL.



"I SPENT MUCH TIME IN THE HILLS, VISITING THE INJURED, BRINGING THEM THE BLESSINGS OF GOD --

"-- AND AT THE HOME OF ONE STONEMASON, WHO'D BROKEN HIS LEG --



"-- I SAW A YOUNG WOMAN I ASSUMED TO BE HIS DAUGHTER.



"I FOUND MORE REASONS TO VISIT, TELLING MYSELF HE WAS AN INFLUENTIAL MAN IN THE COMMUNITY --

"-- AND THAT HIS GOOD OPINION OF US WOULD HELP OUR EFFORTS.



"BUT I WAS LYING TO MYSELF, AND I KNEW IT. I WAS A SINNER, AND MY WEAKNESS BROUGHT ME BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN --

"-- HOPING TO CATCH ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF THOSE FLASHING EYES.

"I WAS A SINNER, AND I PAID THE PRICE --



"-- FOR LABORERS WERE NOT THE ONLY ONES WHO HAD COME OVER ON THE GREAT SHIPS THAT CROSSED THE ATLANTIC.

"THE VAMPIRE **DRAINED** ME,
AND LEFT MY CORPSE BURIED
IN GARBAGE AND **FILTH**.
AND THREE DAYS LATER --

"-- I
AROSE."

Uh.

WELL, IF -- I MEAN
I'M NOT DISPUTING
YOU, I **BELIEVE**
YOU, BUT IF --

YOU
WEAR A
CROSS ON
YOUR CHEST.
DOESN'T
THAT -- WELL,
HURT?

YES.

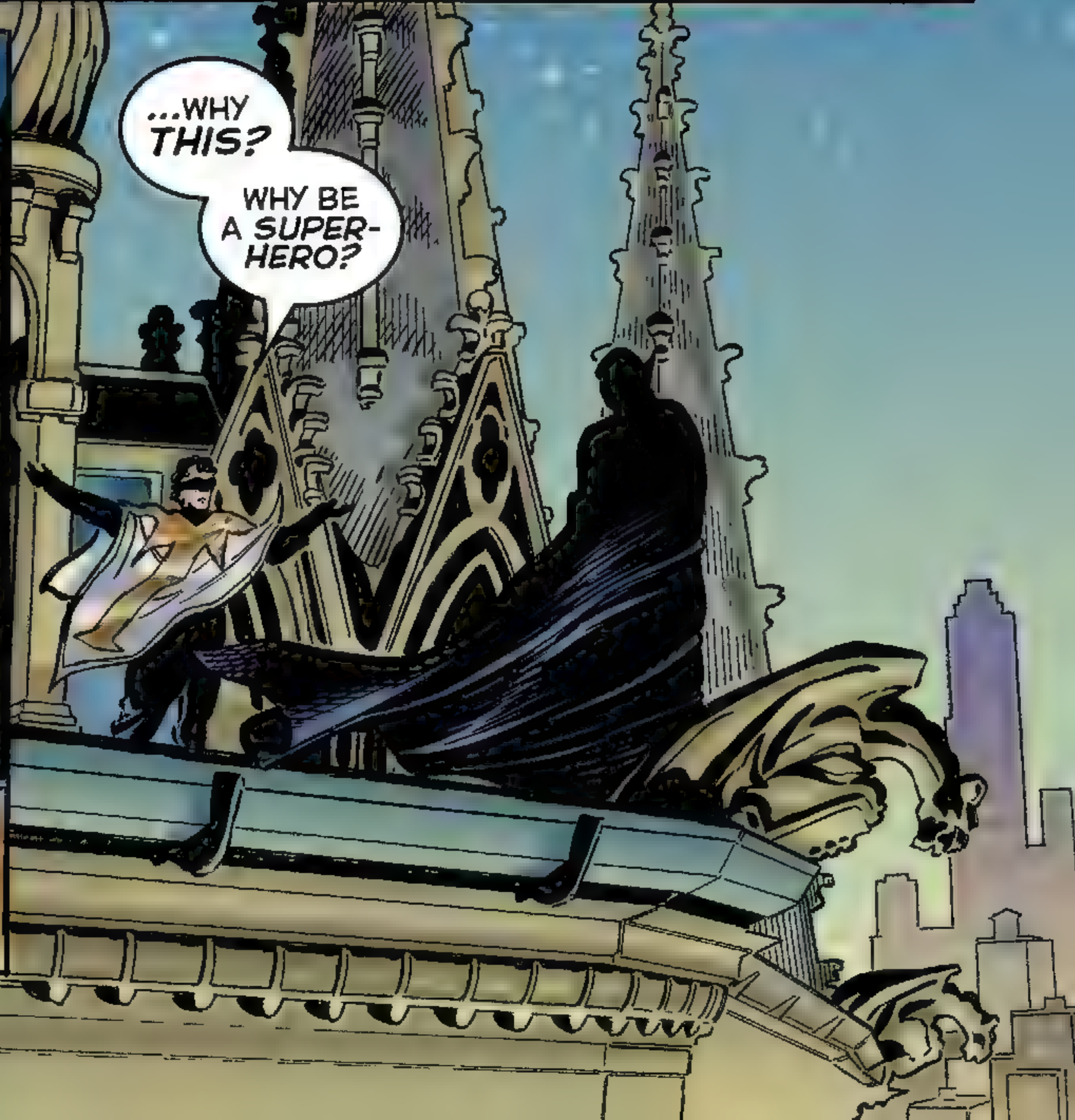
IT IS **MEANT** TO.
IT IS A FORM OF
MORTIFICATION.

YOU
MEAN, LIKE
MONKS **WHIPPING**
THEMSELVES -- AS
PUNISHMENT FOR,
UM, **SINFUL**
THOUGHTS?

NOBODY --
NOBODY REALLY
DOES THAT, DO
THEY?

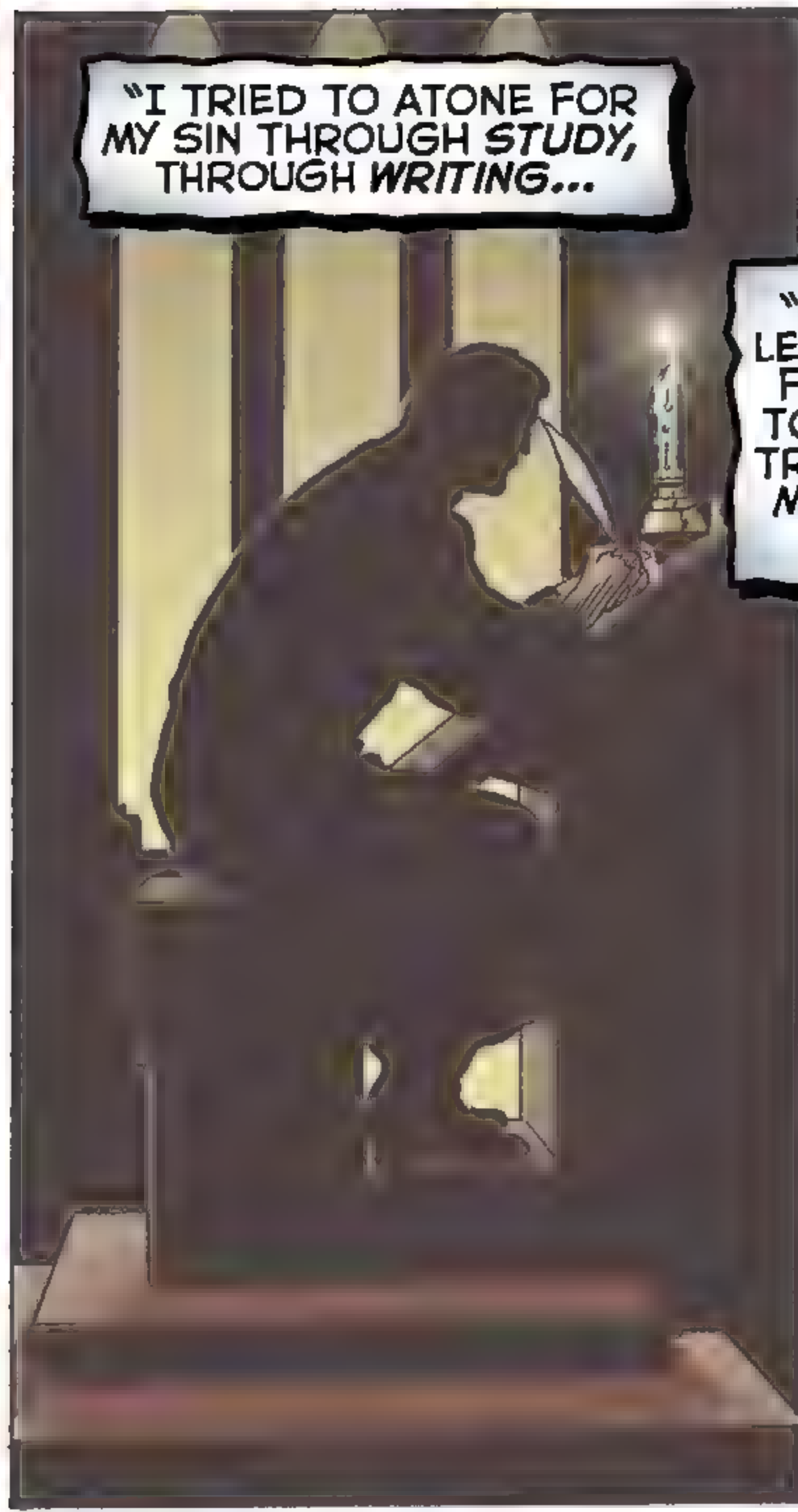
IT IS **MORE** THAN THAT.
THE PAIN IS A **FOCUS** --
IT REMINDS US OF OUR
FRAILITY, AND DISTRACTS
OUR MINDS FROM
SIN.

I... **THIRST**,
LIKE ALL VAMPIRES.
BUT THE PAIN --
IT HELPS ME TO
RESIST, GIVES ME
SOMETHING ELSE
TO FEEL IN ITS
STEAD.





I...TRIED TO LIVE, IF NOT AS A MAN, THEN STILL AS A PRIEST.



"I TRIED TO ATONE FOR MY SIN THROUGH *STUDY*, THROUGH *WRITING*...



"BUT WHEN I LEFT MY WRITING FOR OTHERS TO *FIND*, THEY TRIED TO HUNT ME DOWN, TO *KILL* ME.

"I ELUDED THEM, *HID* FROM THEM...



"...AND IN THE END, THEY GAVE UP THE *SEARCH*, AND WALLED OFF THE WING OF THE CATHEDRAL THEY THOUGHT WAS MY LAIR...

"...LEAVING IT *UNFINISHED*, UNCONSECRATED, EVEN TODAY.



"FOR YEARS, I DREW INTO *MYSELF*, AVOIDING ALL CONTACT... SUSTAINING MYSELF THROUGH *PRAYER*.

"BUT I FELT MYSELF... MY *HUMANITY*... SLIPPING FURTHER AND FURTHER AWAY. AND I GREW *FEARFUL* OF WHAT I MIGHT BECOME.



"BY THEN, HOWEVER, THE MASKED HERO CALLED *AIR ACE* HAD EMERGED...

"...HE, AND OTHERS LIKE HIM."



"AND I SAW IN THEM
A HOPE...A HOPE
THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE
TO HAVE SECRETS,
TO MASK ONE'S
TRUE NATURE..."

"...AND YET
STILL TO
WALK AMONG
MEN."



...AND IT
HAS BEEN...
IT HAS BEEN
GOOD.



GEEZ. IT
SOUNDS...
...ROUGH.

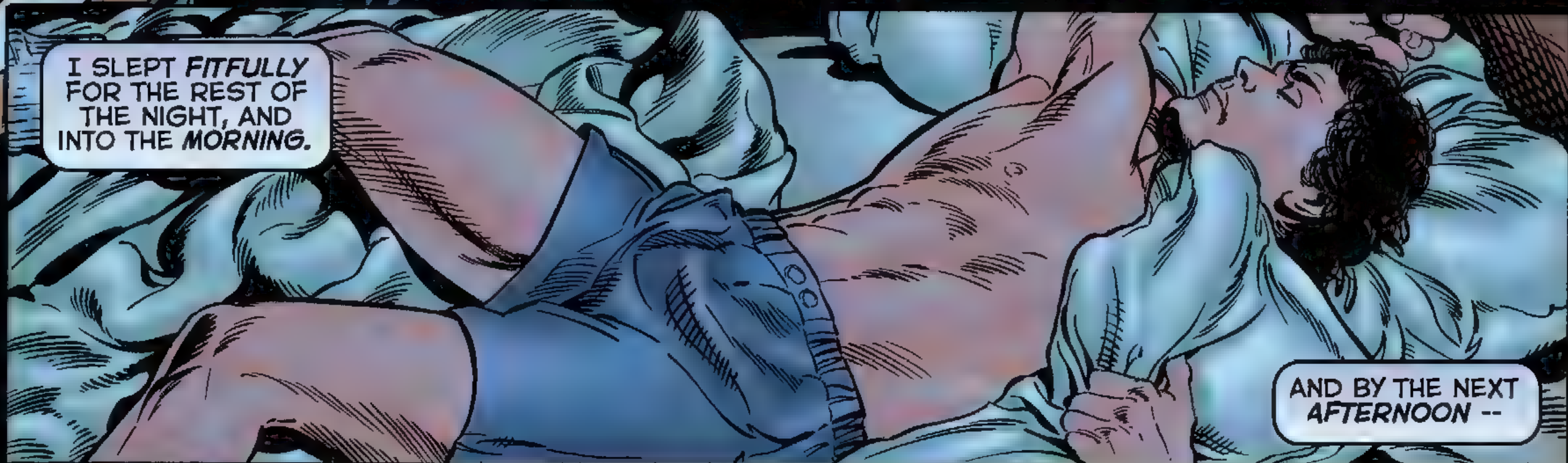


SO,
UM, WHY
ME?



WELL, ONE OF
THE PRIESTLY
DUTIES
IS...

...IS TO
TEACH.



-- FOOTAGE
RELEASED BY THE
MAYOR'S OFFICE,
OF THE RESPONSE
TO AN OFFICIAL
DEMAND THAT THE
ALIEN CRAFT BE
RELEASED --

-- MR. MAYOR,
BUT WE CAN'T DO
THAT. IT'S TOO
DANGEROUS, TOO
RISKY. WE HAVE MORE
TESTS WE NEED
TO DO --

-- AND THUS
WE'D LIKE TO
RENEW OUR REQUEST
FOR THE CONTACT
MATRIX, WHICH IS
ONLY ON LOAN TO
THE MUSEUM
FROM --

CONTACT
WAS BROKEN AT
THIS POINT, LEADING
TO THE MAYOR'S
ANNOUNCEMENT --

TOO DANGEROUS.
TOO RISKY. WHAT
ARE WE,
CHILDREN?

OR IS IT
SOMETHING
WORSE --
SOMETHING
THEY DON'T
WANT US TO
KNOW?

WE MUST DECIDE,
FELLOW CITIZENS --
WE MUST DECIDE
WHO WILL BE IN
CONTROL OF
THIS PLANET.
HUMANS --

-- OR
SUPER-
POWERED
**BABY-
SITTERS!**

I HAVE TAKEN NO
POLLS, CONVENED
NO FOCUS GROUPS.
I KNOW ONLY WHAT MY
ANSWER IS -- AND
I HOPE YOU'LL
SHARE IT.

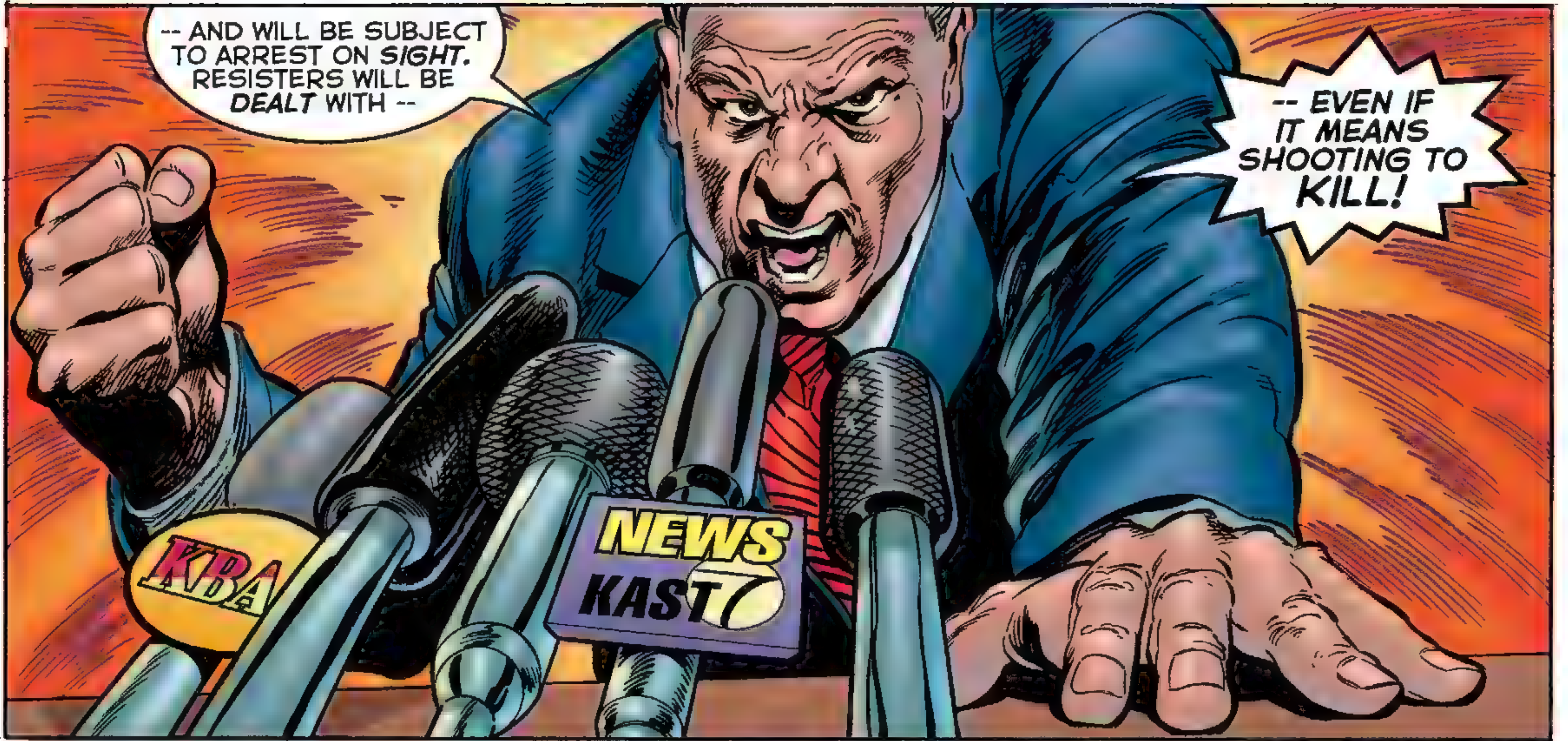
OUR
FUTURE,
OUR DESTINY,
OUR PLANET --
THEY MUST BE
OURS!

ACCORDINGLY, WITH THE
FULL APPROVAL OF THE
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT,
WE ARE SHUTTING THE
"HEROES" DOWN --

-- ALL OF
THEM.

WE ARE
THE FIRST CITY
TO DO THIS --
BUT I DO NOT
EXPECT WE WILL
BE THE
LAST.

FROM THIS
MOMENT ON,
COSTUMED
VIGILANTES ARE NO
LONGER WELCOME
IN ASTRO
CITY --



THAT NIGHT, I WORE MY COSTUME. IT WOULD HAVE FELT LIKE COWARDICE NOT TO. I AVOIDED SEVERAL E.A.G.L.E. PATROLS --

-- STOPPED A FEW LOOTERS WHO THOUGHT THE MAYOR'S ORDER MEANT THEY HAD A LICENSE TO STEAL --



-- AND ENDED UP AT THE CATHEDRAL. LOOKING OUT AT THE CITY, TRYING TO SEE WHAT THE CONFESSOR DID.

BUT ALL I SAW WERE BUILDINGS. BUILDINGS FULL OF UNGRATEFUL, SMALL-MINDED SHEEP WHO DIDN'T DESERVE THEIR HEROES --

THEY COULD HAVE STOOD UP TO HIM. THEY COULD HAVE TOLD HIM HE WAS WRONG, IF THEY DISAGREED...

YOU ARE UNHAPPY TONIGHT, YOUNG BRIAN.

I DON'T KNOW HOW I FEEL.

EVERYTHING'S SWIRLING AROUND, AND I'M CAUGHT UP IN ALL OF IT, AND AT EVERY SIDE, EVERY TURN --

THIS ISN'T WHAT I THOUGHT IT WOULD BE LIKE. IT ISN'T WHAT I THOUGHT AT ALL.

IT LOOKED SIMPLE... BUT IT'S NOT.

-- NOTHING'S WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE. NOTHING'S EASY.

AND IT'S NOT LIKE I THOUGHT IT WAS GOING TO BE A WALK IN THE PARK, BUT --





A LOT
OF THINGS
LOOK
SIMPLE...

...FROM THE
OUTSIDE.

AND
ABOVE --

[illegible]

— איה= קק
טאט טאטטא
אאאא א
קקקק!

קקקק =טאק,
אאאאאאאאאאאא,
קק אאאאא אאאא
טאטטא אאאא
טאק. —

— אה
אחא וקא
אפסא

אחא! אחא! אחא!







HE'D GONE INTO SHADOW HILL
HUNTING THE APPARENTLY-
MYSTIC KILLER WHO'D BEEN
PLAGUING ASTRO CITY.

TRAINED, ARMED, EXPERIENCED --
HE'D GONE IN, SAYING HE'D HAVE
THE KILLER IN CUSTODY IN UNDER
A WEEK.

BUT HE DIDN'T
COME OUT.

NOT UNTIL HE WAS FOUND
BY A HILL RESIDENT, CURLED
INTO A FETAL POSITION IN
AN ALLEY CORNER --

-- GRIMY, DROOLING,
BLEEDING AND
BARELY BREATHING.
ACCORDING TO
NEWS REPORTS, HIS
MIND WAS GONE.

I NEED MORE
PLASMA -- **STAT!**
THIS MAN'S LOST AN
INCREDIBLE AMOUNT
OF BLOOD! AND HIS
VITALS...I JUST
DON'T KNOW.

BUT RADIO
F.B.U. -- GET A
CYBERNETICIST TO
THE HOSPITAL AND
PREPPED. I DON'T
KNOW WHAT HALF
HIS SYSTEMS
DO --

-- AND THE
OTHER HALF
ARE FRIED!

THAT'S HOW
MORDECAI CHALK
CAME OUT OF
SHADOW HILL.

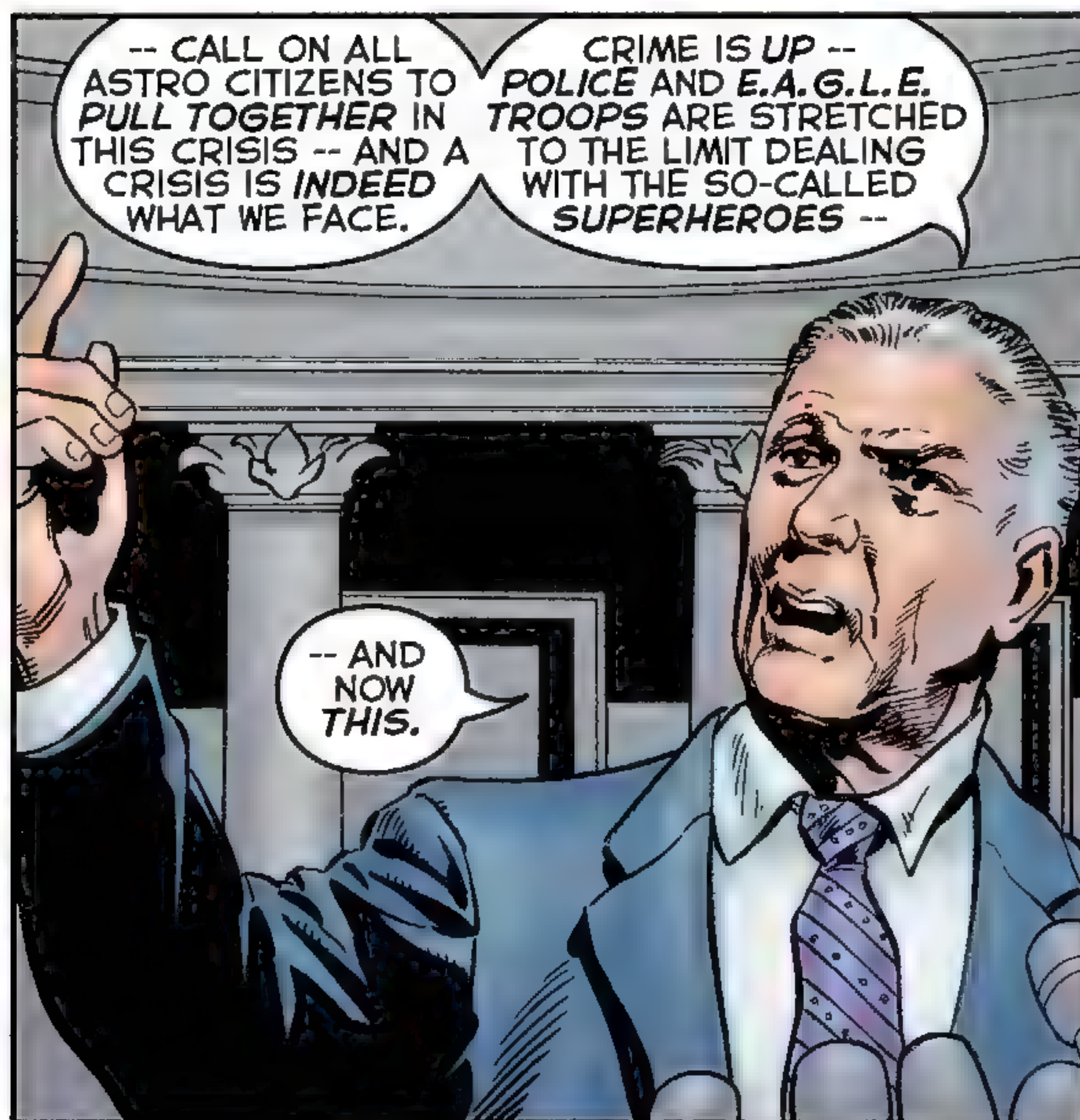
PATTERDS



AND THERE YOU HAVE IT. HE MET... **SOMETHING**. AS TO THE **DETAILS** -- AT THIS POINT, ONLY **TIME** WILL TELL.



THE MAYOR ISSUED A **STATEMENT** THIS MORNING, UPON HEARING OF THE **TRAGIC DEVELOPMENTS**...



-- CALL ON ALL **ASTRO CITIZENS** TO **PULL TOGETHER** IN THIS **CRISIS** -- AND A **CRISIS** IS **INDEED** WHAT WE FACE.

CRIME IS UP -- **POLICE** AND **E.A.G.L.E. TROOPS** ARE STRETCHED TO THE **LIMIT** DEALING WITH THE **SO-CALLED SUPERHEROES** --

-- AND **NOW THIS**.



THE **BOTTOM LINE** IS THE **SAFETY** OF THE **CITIZENRY** --

-- BUT THE "**HEROES**" SEEM TO HAVE **FORGOTTEN** THAT. **ONCE AGAIN**, I **URGE** THEM -- **HELP US**. **WORK WITH US**. YOUR **INTRANSIGENCE** IS **DIVISIVE** --



-- AND ANYTHING **LESS THAN FULL COOPERATION** IS **HARMFUL** TO US ALL.

PSHYEAH, RIGHT. HE IS SO **FULL** OF IT.

HE'S A **POLITICIAN**, **WHADDYA EXPECT?** **C'MON**, **GILLIGAN'S ISLAND'S ON**.

THE **MAYOR** WAS **WRONG**. THE **HEROES** WERE **DOING FINE** -- OR AT LEAST **DOING THEIR BEST** --



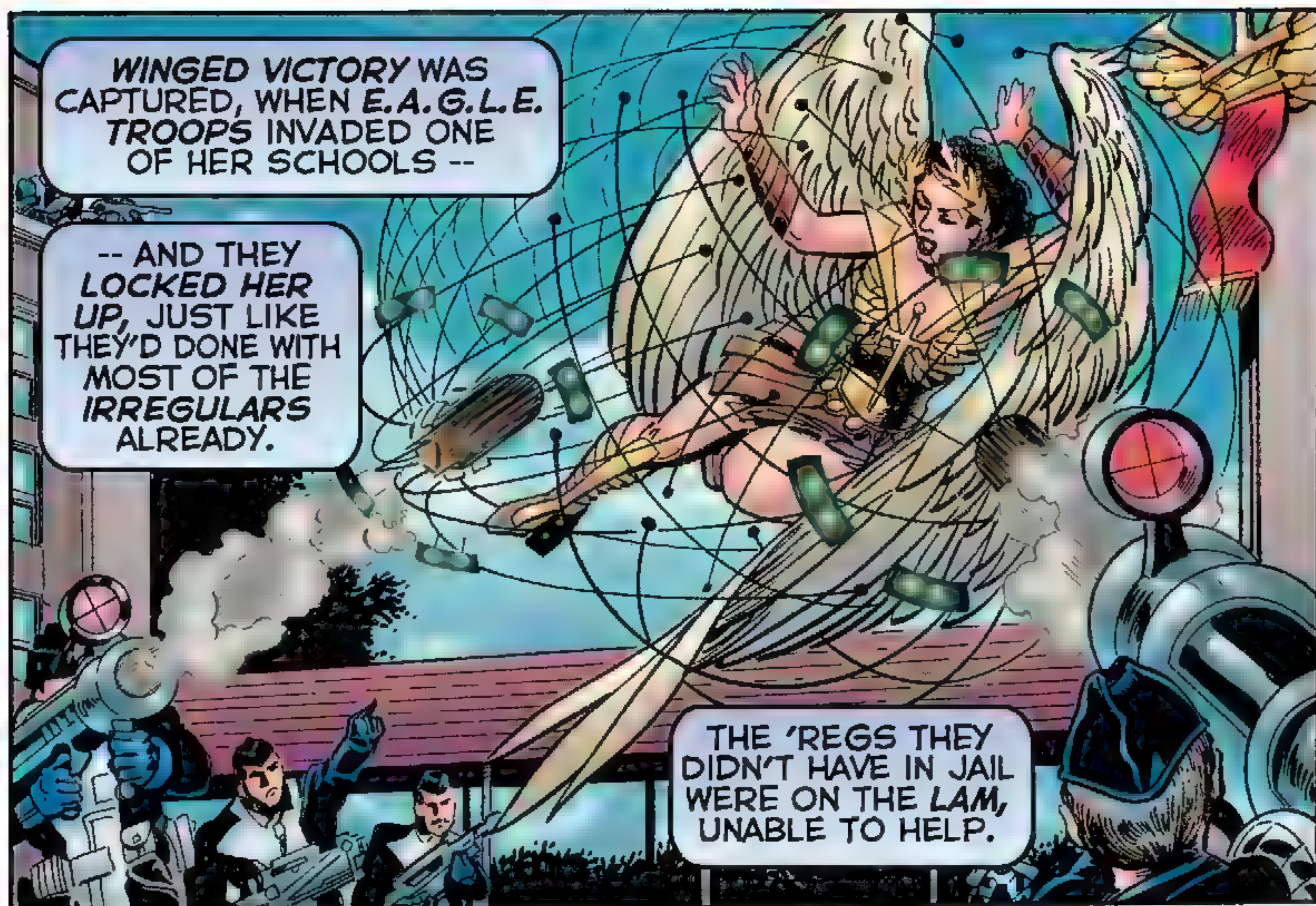
-- UNTIL THE MAYOR DECIDED HE WANTED 'EM ALL UNDER HIS *THUMB*, AND DECLARED THEM *OUTLAWS* WHEN THEY WOULDN'T PLAY.

WE
MUST WORK
TOGETHER,
IF WE --

KK

-- BUT
LOVEYYY
--!

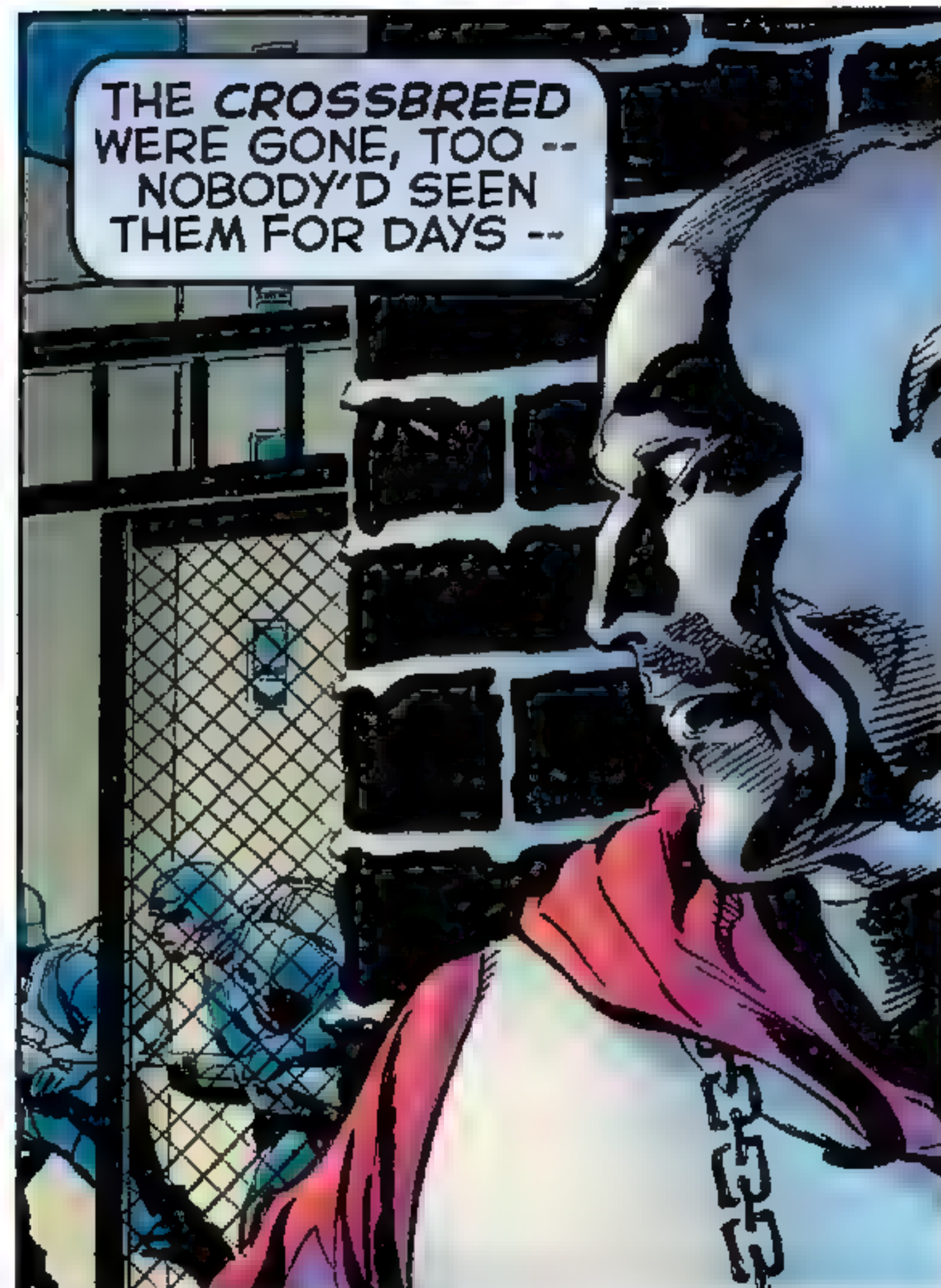
AND LOOK
WHAT HE GOT.



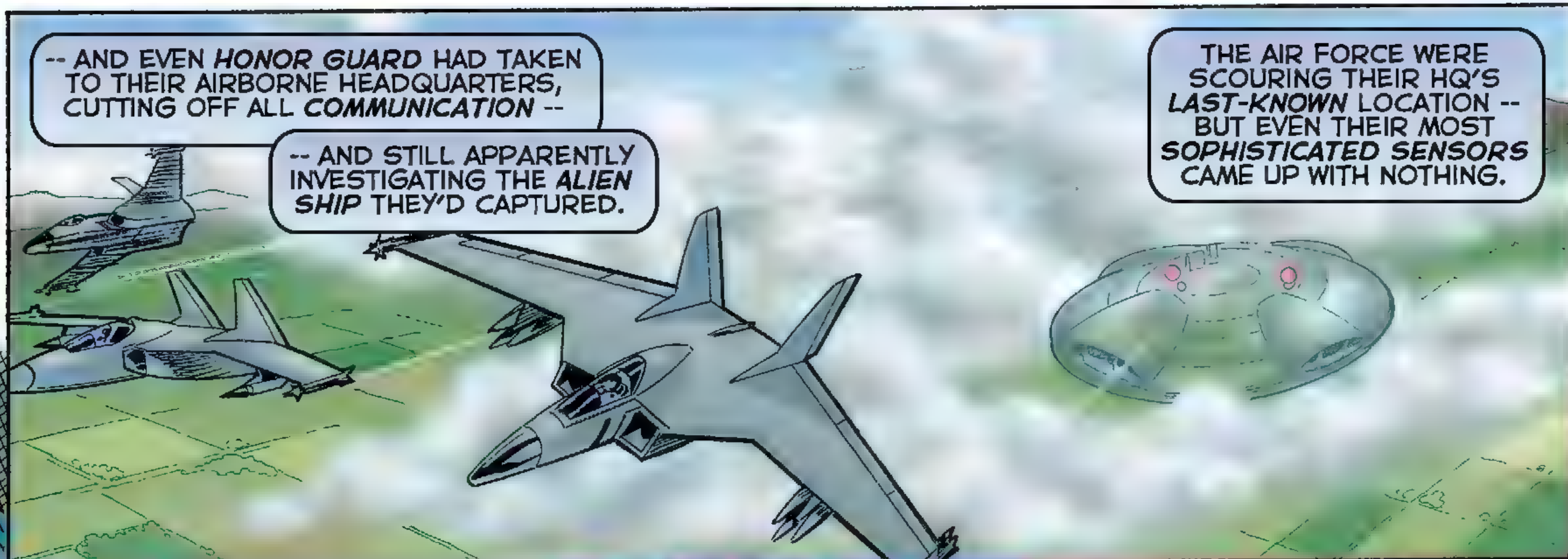
WINGED VICTORY WAS
CAPTURED, WHEN E.A.G.L.E.
TROOPS INVADED ONE
OF HER SCHOOLS --

-- AND THEY
LOCKED HER
UP, JUST LIKE
THEY'D DONE WITH
MOST OF THE
IRREGULARS
ALREADY.

THE 'REGS THEY
DIDN'T HAVE IN JAIL
WERE ON THE LAM,
UNABLE TO HELP.



THE *CROSSBREED*
WERE GONE, TOO --
NOBODY'D SEEN
THEM FOR DAYS --



-- AND EVEN *HONOR GUARD* HAD TAKEN
TO THEIR AIRBORNE HEADQUARTERS,
CUTTING OFF ALL *COMMUNICATION* --

-- AND STILL APPARENTLY
INVESTIGATING THE *ALIEN*
SHIP THEY'D CAPTURED.

THE AIR FORCE WERE
SCOURING THEIR HQ'S
LAST-KNOWN LOCATION --
BUT EVEN THEIR MOST
SOPHISTICATED SENSORS
CAME UP WITH NOTHING.



STILL, *SAMARITAN*
HAD BEEN SIGHTED
IN NEW DELHI,
FIGHTING ALONGSIDE
THE *UNCLEAN* --

-- AND OTHER
REPORTS HAD HIM IN
CANADA, JAPAN, AND THE
CANARY ISLANDS. HE
WASN'T QUITTING.

BUT IT WAS HARD
TO BLAME THOSE
WHO HAD.

THE FIRST FAMILY
HAD PUT UP A FORCE
FIELD WHEN THE CITY
TRIED TO REPOSSESS
THEIR BASE --

-- AND WHILE E.A.G.L.E.
COULDN'T GET IN, THEY
COULDN'T EXACTLY
GET OUT, EITHER.

AND OF COURSE, MAYOR
STEVENSON WAS SQUAWKING
ABOUT HOW THE MOUNT KIRBY
OBSERVATORY WAS PUBLIC LAND --

-- AND HOW DARE
THEY FLOUT THE
LAW, AND BLAH
BLAH BLAH.

I NOTICED HE DIDN'T
TALK THAT MUCH ABOUT
JACK-IN-THE-BOX --

WHKDOOM WHKDOOM WHKDOOM

-- NOT AFTER
WHAT HAPPENED
OVER THE
GAINES RIVER.

I DIDN'T THINK HE WAS
DEAD, BUT IT WAS TOO
MUCH LIKE 1982, WHEN HE
VANISHED FOR YEARS.

IF HE WAS DEAD, IT WAS
STEVENSON'S FAULT.
AND SO WERE ALL THE
OTHERS, LOCKED UP OR
CHASED AWAY OR WORSE.

AND WHAT DID THE PUBLIC DO? DID THEY STAND UP FOR THE HEROES WHO'D STOOD UP FOR THEM FOR DECADES?

HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT? THE HEROES ARE HERE TO HELP!

BETTER DO SOME READING, SHERRIE. YOUR MOM EVER TELL YOU ABOUT THE BLUE KNIGHT? THE PALE HORSEMAN?

THIS ISN'T LIKE THAT... IS IT?

MAYBE NOT, BUT NONE OF THE HEROES COOPERATED. NONE OF 'EM. YOU GOTTA FIGURE THERE'S SOMETHING THERE...

MAYBE THEY SHOULD JUST DRAFT 'EM ALL. IF THEY WERE IN THE ARMY, IT'D BE OKAY, RIGHT? THEY'D DO WHAT WE WANT.

Oh, THE HELL WITH YOU!

THE HELL WITH YOU ALL!

Huh?

BRIAN?

IT WAS LIKE THAT ALL OVER. NOBODY GOT IT. NOBODY UNDERSTOOD. AND I JUST WANTED --

BRIAN!

--I WANTED TO SMASH ALL THEIR FACES IN.

THEN...

HEY, HEY, KID.

Huh?

TELL YOUR *FRIEND* -- THE ONE IN *BLACK*. MIGHT BE A GOOD TIME FOR A *VACATION* -- OR EVEN RETIREMENT. *GETTING ON* IN YEARS, AIN'T HE? OR HE COULD *COME IN*, SET AN EXAMPLE FOR THE *OTHERS*. COOPERATE.

WH-- ?

I'M SURE HE WOULDN'T WANT PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED ON *SHADOW HILL* A WEEK OR SO BACK.

WORD TO THE *WISE*, *HMM?*

I DON'T KNOW WHY I DIDN'T TELL THE CONFESSOR ABOUT IT *RIGHT AWAY*. MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE THE GUY SO OBVIOUSLY *WANTED ME* TO...

SO, YOUNG BRIAN...

...HAVE YOU REACHED A *DECISION* YET?

A *DECISION* ?

ABOUT CONTINUING AS *ALTAR BOY*. AS MY PARTNER. YOU HAVEN'T *SPOKEN* ABOUT IT.

OR MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE I HADN'T FIGURED OUT WHAT I *THOUGHT* ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED THAT NIGHT. WHAT I *FOUND OUT*.

HEY, I'M *HERE*, AREN'T I?



YES. BUT
YOU'RE OBVIOUSLY
CONFLICTED ABOUT
SOMETHING...

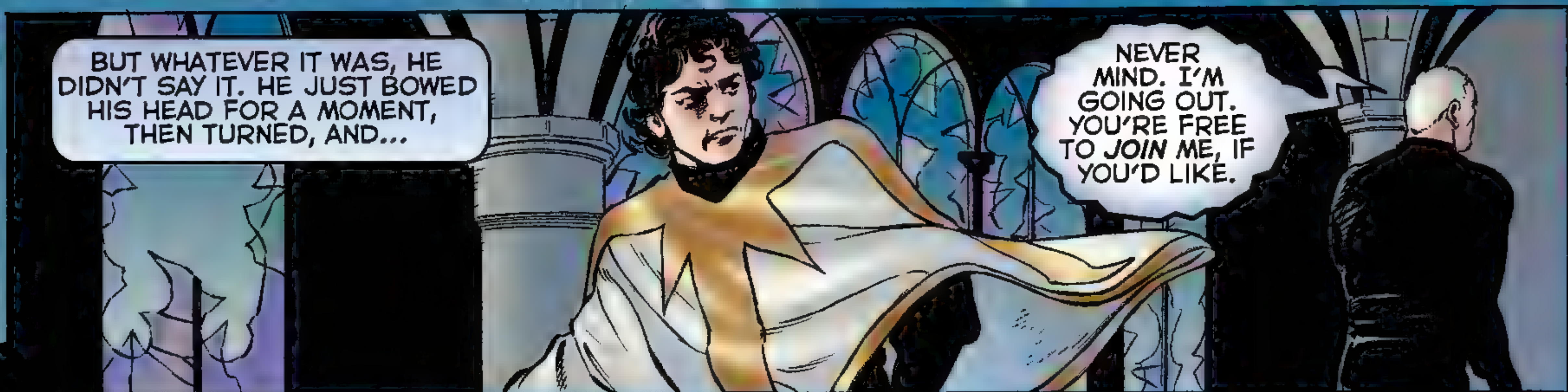
LOOK AT
THE PATTERNS.
SEE WHAT DOESN'T
FIT. THAT'S WHAT
YOU TOLD
ME.

SURELY
YOUR FABULOUS
DETECTIVE SKILLS
CAN HANDLE
THIS.



BRIAN,
I...

WHAT?!



BUT WHATEVER IT WAS, HE
DIDN'T SAY IT. HE JUST BOWED
HIS HEAD FOR A MOMENT,
THEN TURNED, AND...

NEVER
MIND. I'M
GOING OUT.
YOU'RE FREE
TO JOIN ME, IF
YOU'D LIKE.



I'D BEEN DOING IT FOR DAYS.
ACCOMPANYING HIM, BUT
STRICTLY ON A DAY-TO-DAY
BASIS.

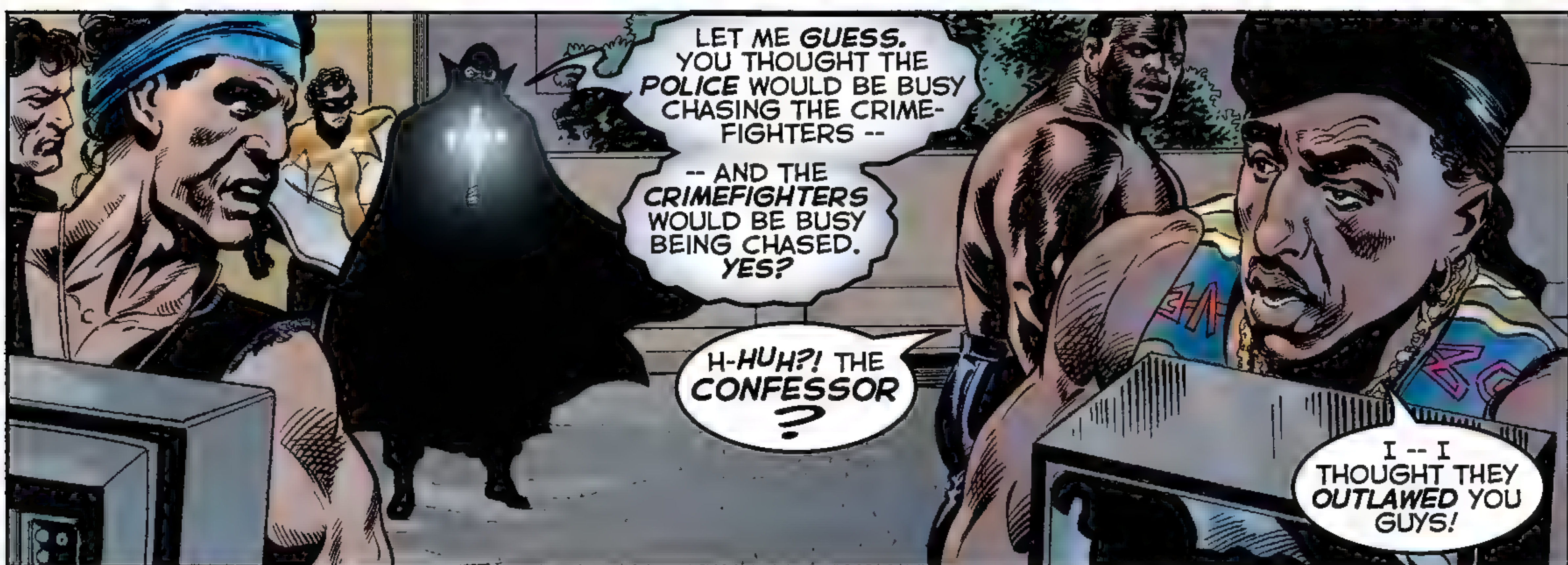
I DIDN'T KNOW
WHAT I WANTED
TO DO.

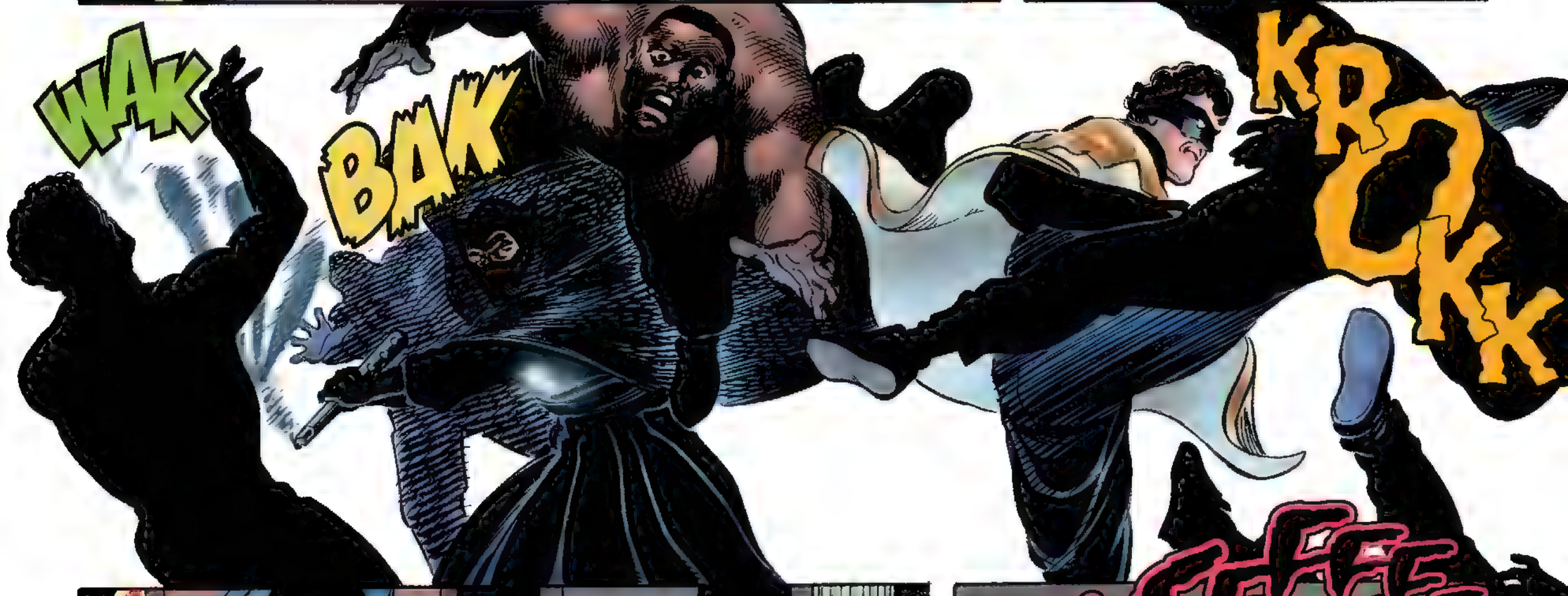
I COULDN'T QUIT --
NOT WHEN IT WOULD
FEEL LIKE KNUCKLING
UNDER TO THE
MAYOR. BUT --



-- BUT HE WAS
A VAMPIRE.
AND HE HADN'T
TOLD ME.

IT DIDN'T FEEL
RIGHT. NOTHING
FELT RIGHT.

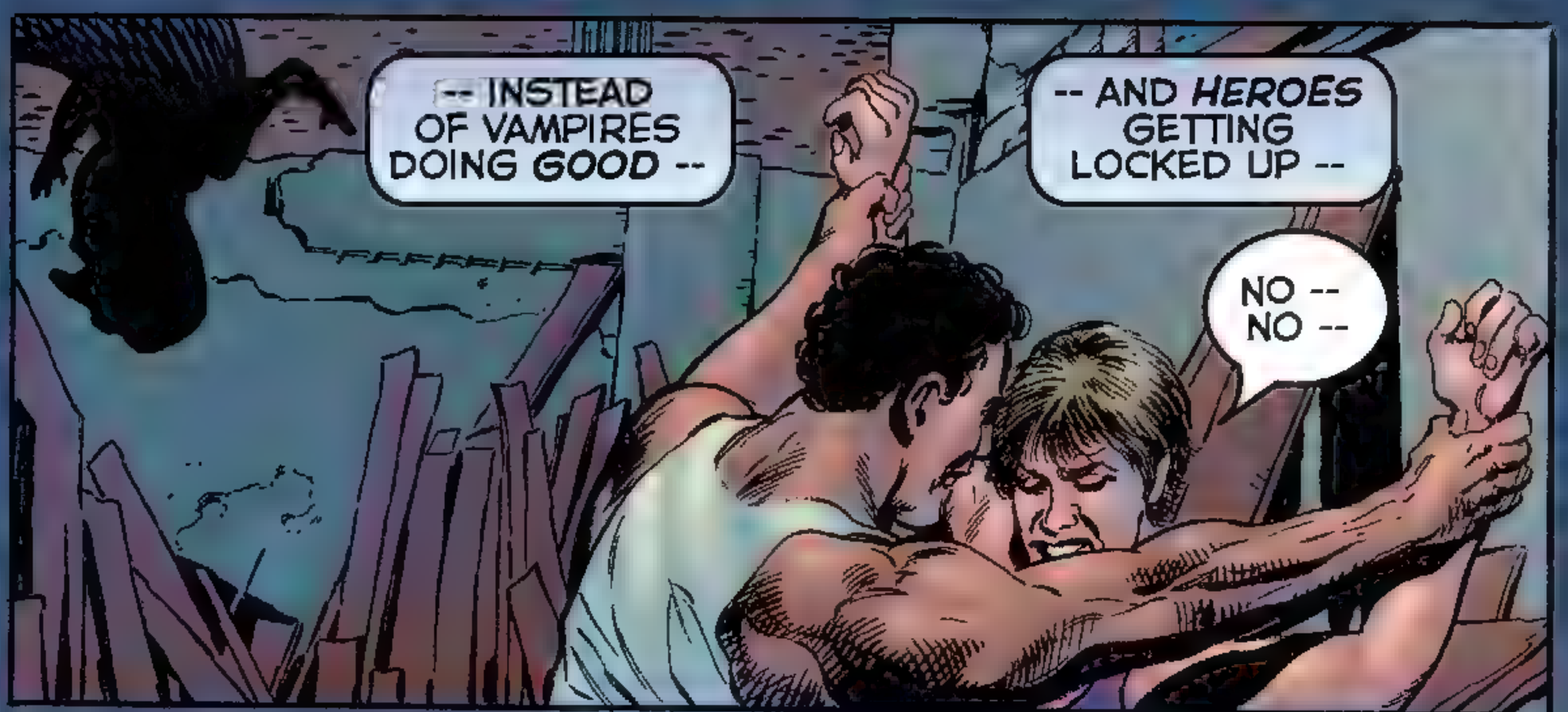






RIGHT
BEHIND
YOU.

IT WAS EASIER
WHEN THERE WAS
SOMETHING TO
DO. THEN I COULD
CONCENTRATE ON
WHATEVER WAS
GOING ON --



-- INSTEAD
OF VAMPIRES
DOING GOOD --

-- AND HEROES
GETTING
LOCKED UP --

NO --
NO --



-- AND LITTLE GIRLS DYING,
AND THE GARBAGE THEY
THREW AT ME --

H-
huh?



HE WON'T BE
GIVING YOU ANY
MORE TROUBLE,
YOUNG LADY.
YOU'RE SAFE
NOW.

Oh,
I'D SAY
SO.

WE WERE
ACTUALLY
TROLLING FOR
CRACKERJACK --



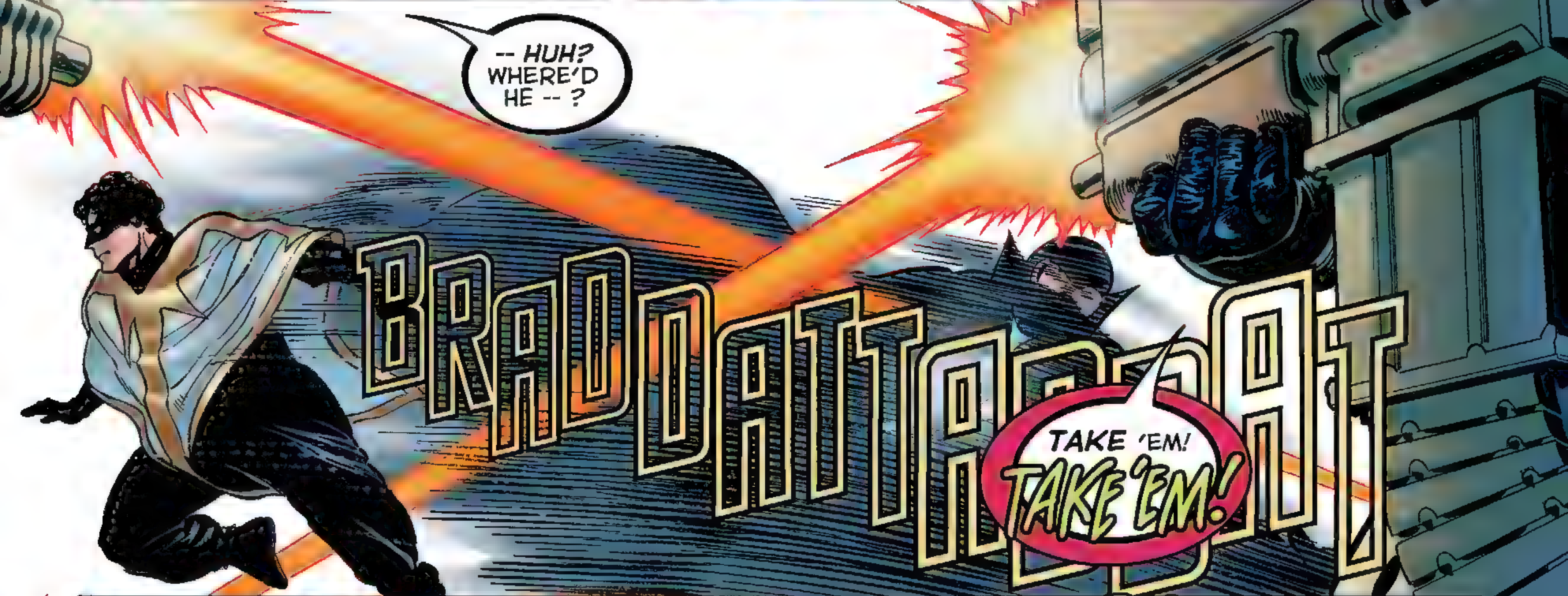
KLIK

KLETSCH

KLAK

TEK

-- BUT
YOU'LL
DO.





GOOD.



-- BUT IN THE TIME THAT TOOK --

YOU --
YOU -- SO
FAST --

-- WHAT
IN GOD'S
NAME ARE
YOU?

AND
THAT'S
THAT.



WHAT ARE
WE? WELL,
SPEAKING
ONLY FOR
MYSELF,
MIND YOU --

-- I'M A
TEENAGE BOY.
BRING THAT UP
AT YOUR NEXT
STORMTROOPER
STRATEGY
SESSION.



ENOUGH
GLOATING, ALTAR
BOY. IT'S TIME WE
WERE AWAY.

GLOATING?
ME?

THEY DID GET CRACKERJACK,
THOUGH, THE NEXT DAY -- EVEN
IF THEY WEREN'T ABLE TO
DETERMINE HIS REAL IDENTITY.

AND
WORSE --

-- E.A.G.L.E. SHIPS
HAVE REPORTEDLY
LOCATED AND CORDONED
OFF HONOR GUARD'S
AIRBORNE HEAD-
QUARTERS --

-- AND EVEN THE
EXPERIMENTALS'
STASIS PODS
HAVE BEEN
CONFISCATED.



REMAINING
AT LARGE ARE
THE GENTLEMAN,
THE CONFESSOR,
THE HANGED
MAN, AND --

KLIK

I CAN'T
WATCH THIS
ANY MORE. LET'S
SEE WHAT'S ON
CHANNEL
THREE.

-- MAYOR PREPARING
FOR TONIGHT'S PUBLIC
MEETING, IN A FEW
MINUTES, TO ANNOUNCE
A SOLUTION TO
THE CRISIS.

IN ADDITION,
THE MAYOR'S
EXPECTED TO
DISCUSS THE
SPECIAL TROOPS
HE'S BRINGING IN,
TO HELP MAINTAIN
ORDER.

KBAC
NEWS

Tamra Dixon

EARLIER TODAY,
HE STRESSED THAT
CITIZENS SHOULD
NOT BE
ALARMED.

SPECIAL
TROOPS?
SPECIAL TROOPS?!
HE'S CAPTURED,
KILLED, OR CHASED
AWAY ALMOST ALL
OF US --



-- AND HE'S
STILL BRINGING
IN "SPECIAL
TROOPS?!"

I DON'T
KNOW. MAYBE
IT'S TIME TO
PACK IT
IN.

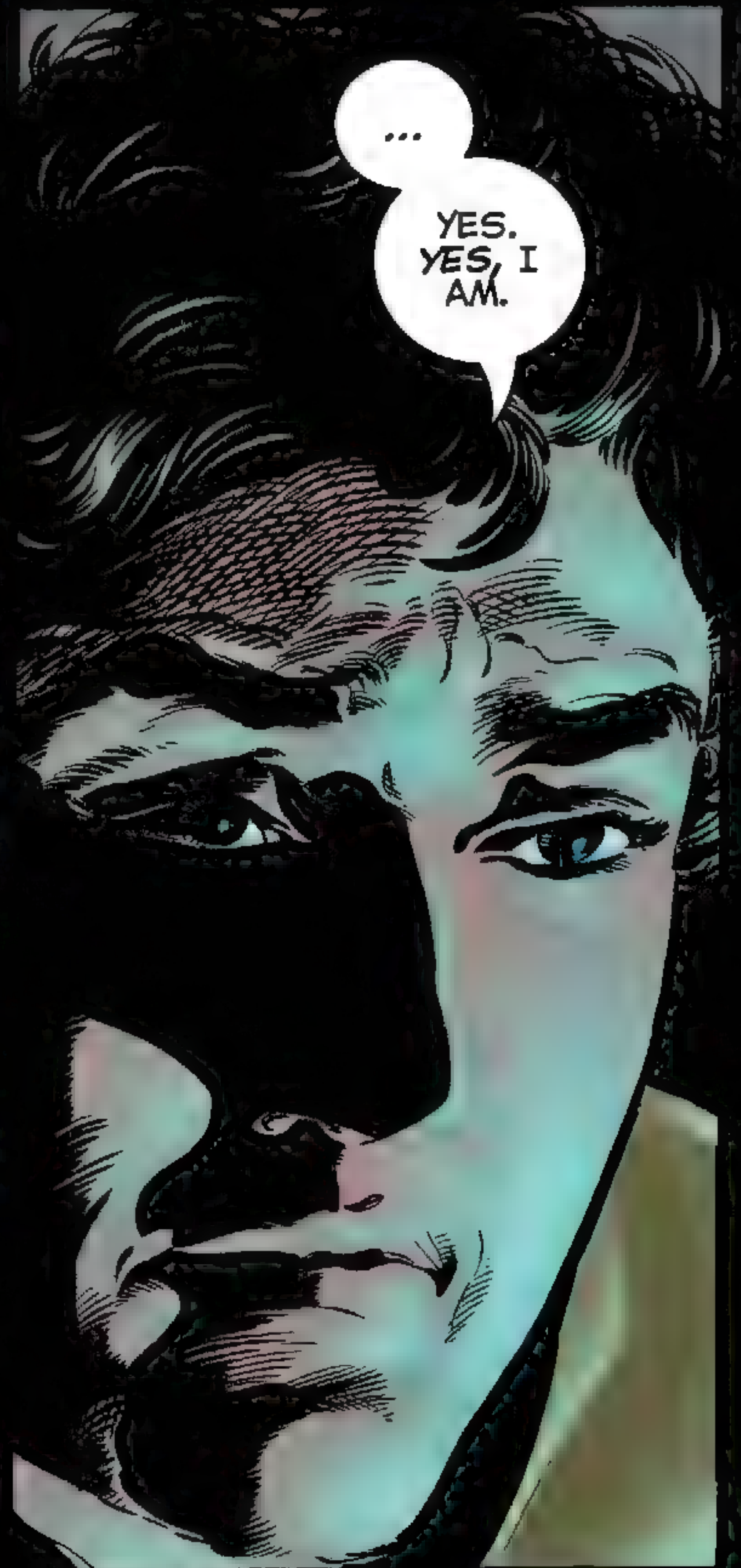
YOU'RE
THINKING
OF QUITTING,
BRIAN? OF
GIVING
UP?



IT WASN'T BECAUSE I
WAS SCARED. IT WAS --
IT WASN'T LIKE I
THOUGHT IT WOULD BE.

ALL THIS FUSS --
ALL THIS HATRED --
AND THEN --

-- AND
THEN --



...
YES.
YES, I
AM.



IF YOU
QUIT, HE
WINS.

SO
WHAT?!



IT'S NOT
LIKE ANYONE
CARES, RIGHT?
HECK, THEY'RE
PRACTICALLY
CHEERING
HIM ON!

YOU'VE
SEEN IT --
THEY THREW
GARBAGE
AT US!



AND IS THAT WHY
WE DO WHAT WE
DO? FOR PUBLIC
APPROVAL, FOR
FAME?

DO WE HELP
PEOPLE BECAUSE
THEY WILL BE
APPROPRIATELY
GRATEFUL -- OR
MERELY BECAUSE
THEY NEED THE
HELP?

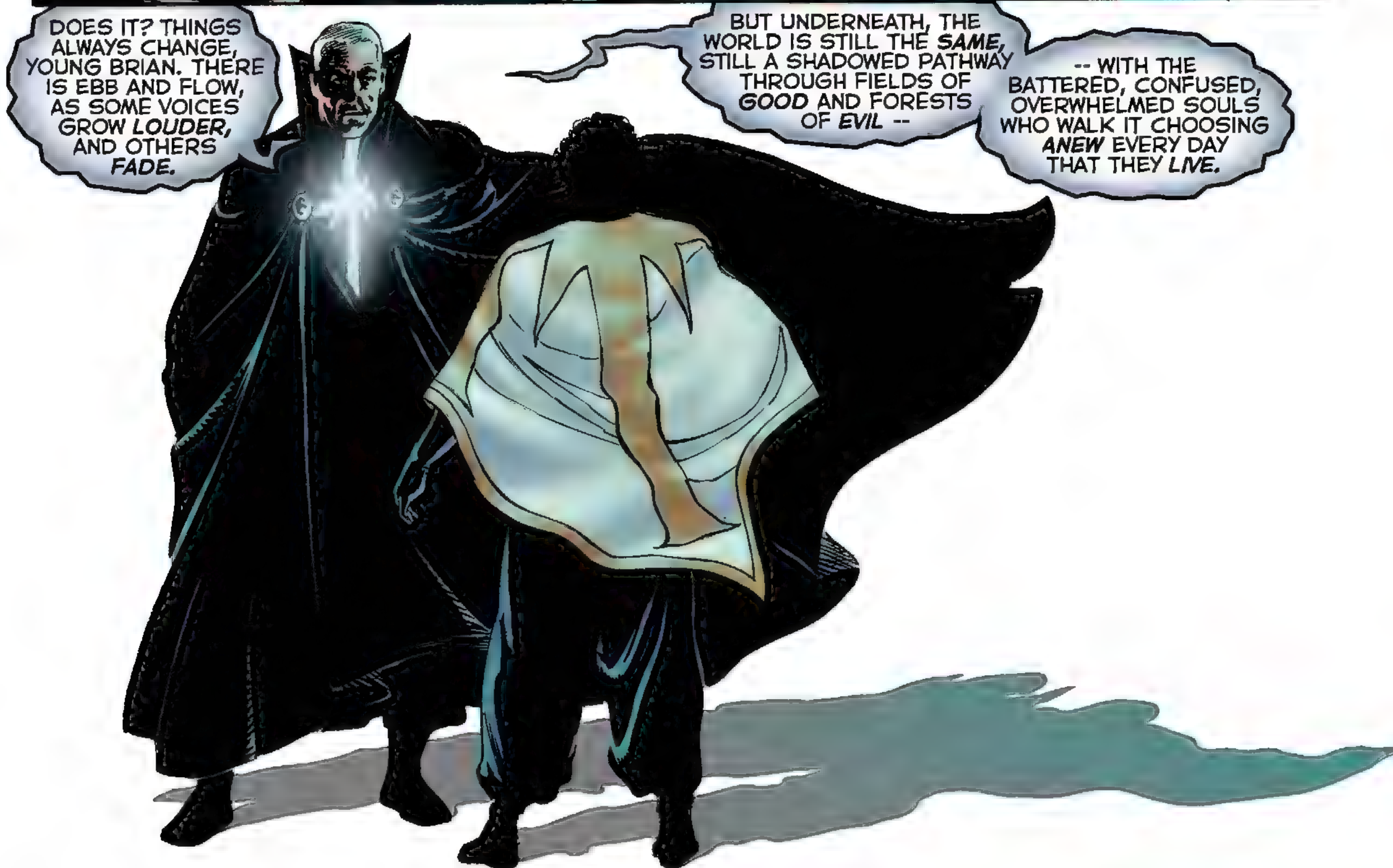
HE SOUNDED
LIKE MY DAD.



IT'S NOT --
IT'S NOT THAT
SIMPLE --

WHY
NOT?

BECAUSE EVERYTHING'S
CHANGED. BECAUSE THEY'RE
TRYING TO LOCK US UP, OR
KILL US! THAT MAKES
THINGS DIFFERENT!

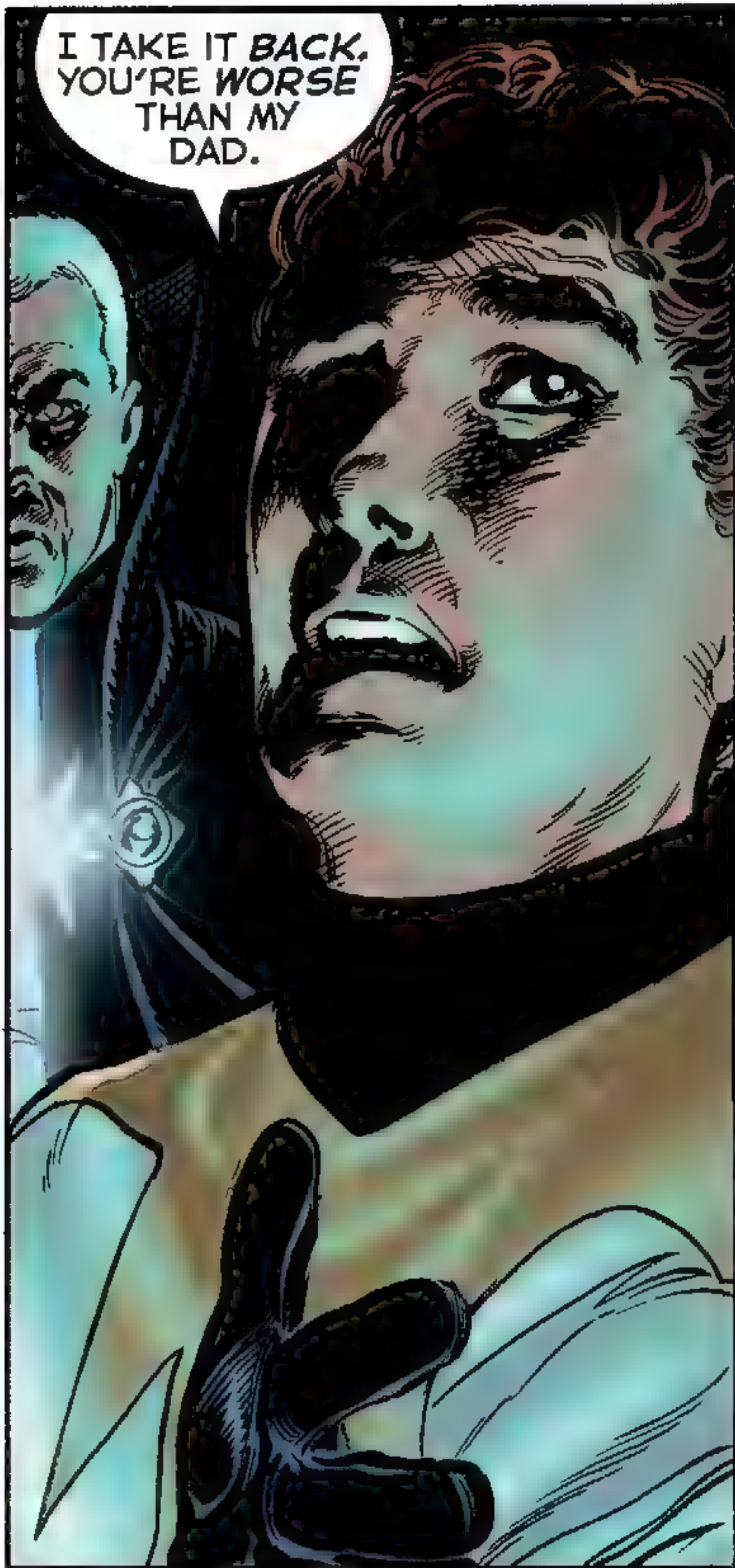


DOES IT? THINGS
ALWAYS CHANGE,
YOUNG BRIAN. THERE
IS EBB AND FLOW,
AS SOME VOICES
GROW LOUDER,
AND OTHERS
FADE.

BUT UNDERNEATH, THE
WORLD IS STILL THE SAME,
STILL A SHADOWED PATHWAY
THROUGH FIELDS OF
GOOD AND FORESTS
OF EVIL --

-- WITH THE
BATTERED, CONFUSED,
OVERWHELMED SOULS
WHO WALK IT CHOOSING
ANEW EVERY DAY
THAT THEY LIVE.

AND IF THE FORCES OF ANGER AND UNREASON ARE GROWING, IF HUMANITY IS LOSING SIGHT OF THEIR PATH -- -- THEN IS IT NOT ALL THE MORE CRUCIAL THAT THEY BE SHOWN THEIR CHOICE? THAT THEY BE SHOWN THE WAY?



I TAKE IT BACK. YOU'RE WORSE THAN MY DAD.

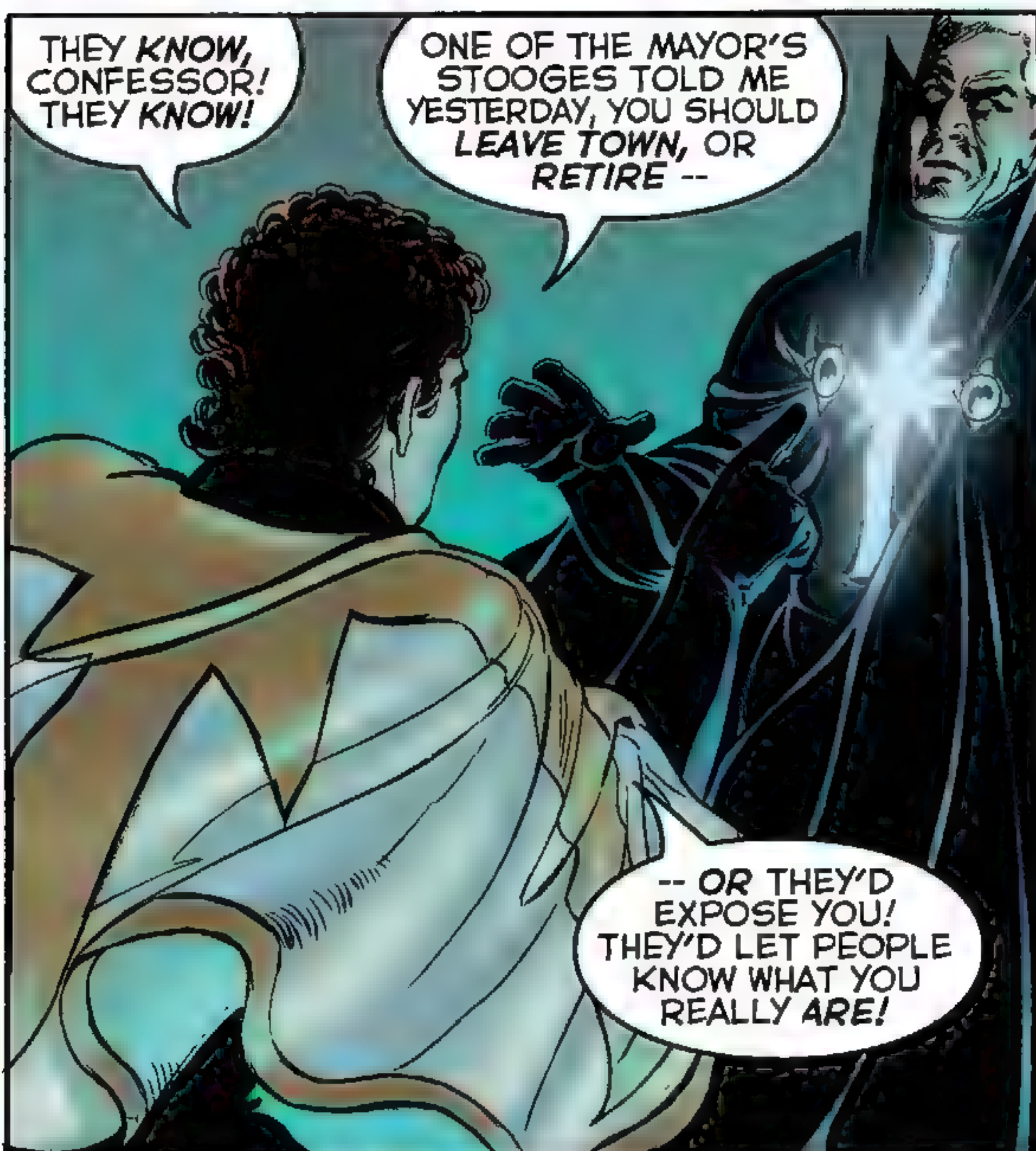


YOUR FATHER SOUNDS LIKE A VERY ADMIRABLE MAN. I'D LIKE TO HAVE MET HIM.



MY FATHER WAS AN IDIOT -- WHO DIED BROKE AND LAUGHED AT! AND YOU, A VAMPIRE, TALKING ABOUT THIS KIND OF --

-- DO YOU THINK FOR A MINUTE THAT ANYONE WOULD LISTEN TO YOU IF -- IF --



THEY KNOW, CONFESSOR! THEY KNOW!

ONE OF THE MAYOR'S STOOGES TOLD ME YESTERDAY, YOU SHOULD LEAVE TOWN, OR RETIRE --

-- OR THEY'D EXPOSE YOU! THEY'D LET PEOPLE KNOW WHAT YOU REALLY ARE!



THINK ABOUT HOW THEY'D REACT -- AND THEN ASK YOURSELF IF YOU STILL WANT TO SAVE 'EM ALL!

THEY...

...THEY KNOW?

BUT IF... IF THEY KNOW, ...IF ALL THEY WANT
AND THEY'RE NOT USING IT... IS FOR ME TO GET
OUT OF THEIR WAY... THEN...

THIS MEETING --
THESE TROOPS!
WHEN DOES IT
START?

IT'S
PROBABLY
ALREADY
STARTING,
BUT --

I'VE
GOT TO
GO. YOU
STAY
HERE.

BUT --
BUT --

-- IT'S NOT
FULL DARK
YET!

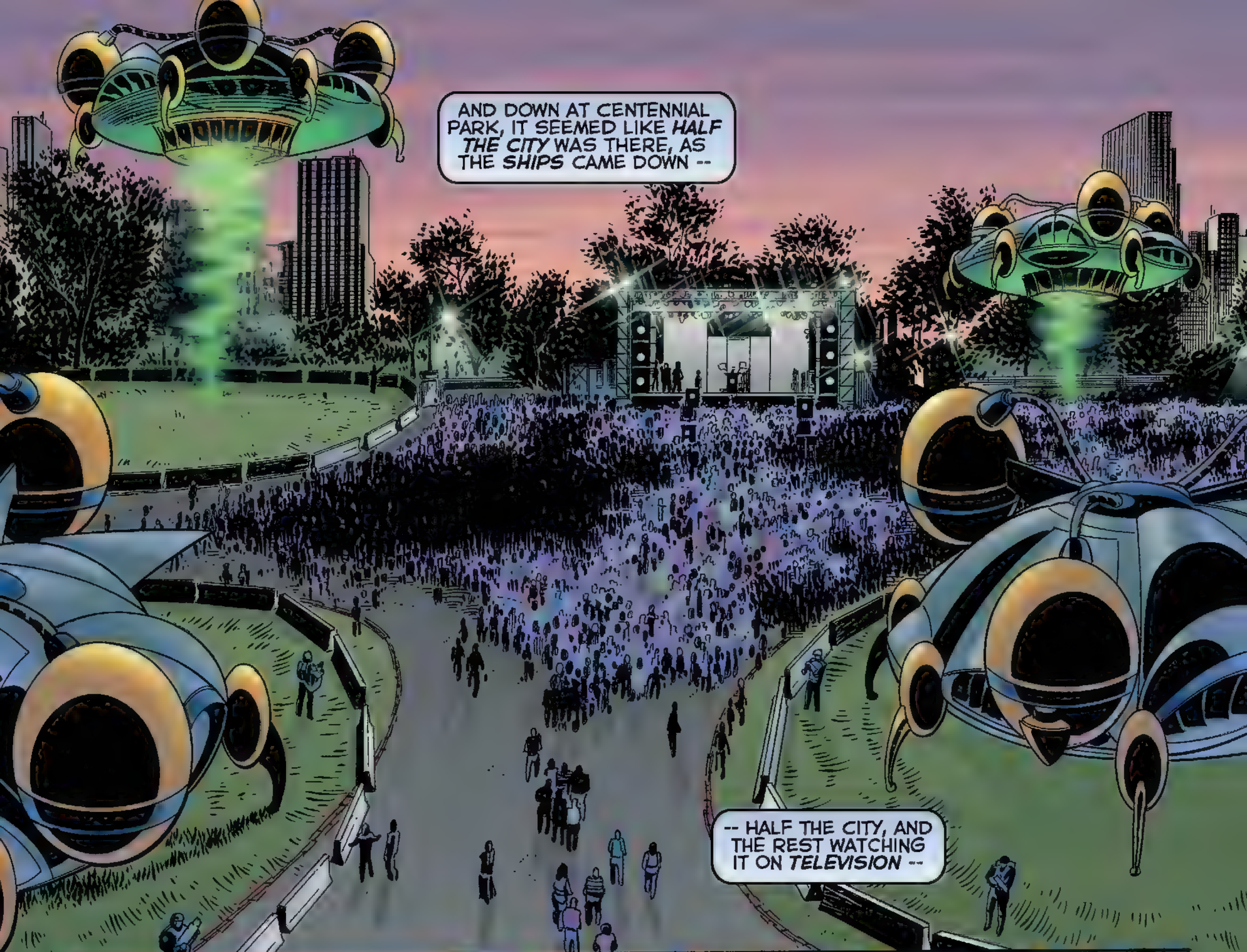
IT DIDN'T
STOP HIM.

I'D BEEN ANGRY, AND WANTED
TO HURT HIM. I'D *BELITTLED*
HIM, TOLD HIM THE *DANGER*
HE WAS IN -- AND IT DIDN'T
SLOW HIM DOWN.

ALL HE SAW WAS
SOME SORT OF DANGER
TO *OTHERS* -- PATTERNS,
AND SOMETHING THAT
DIDN'T FIT --

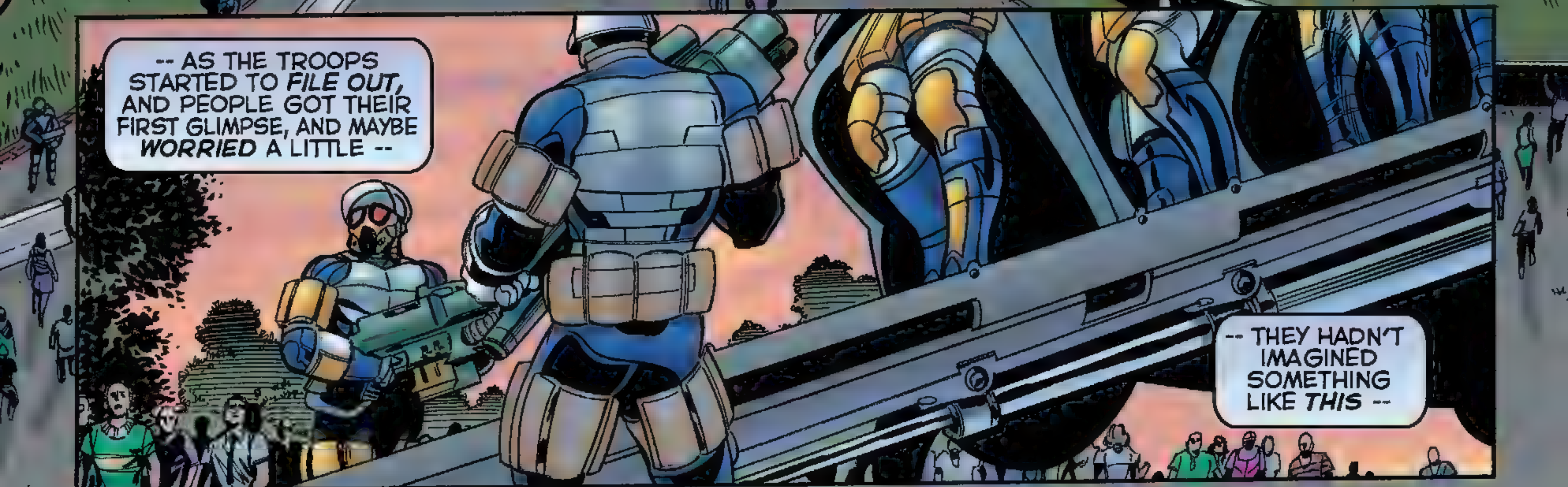
-- AND ALL I COULD
FEEL -- ALL I
COULD FEEL --

-- WAS
SHAME.



AND DOWN AT CENTENNIAL PARK, IT SEEMED LIKE **HALF THE CITY** WAS THERE, AS THE **SHIPS** CAME DOWN --

-- HALF THE CITY, AND THE REST WATCHING IT ON **TELEVISION** --



-- AS THE TROOPS STARTED TO **FILE OUT**, AND PEOPLE GOT THEIR FIRST GLIMPSE, AND MAYBE **WORRIED A LITTLE** --

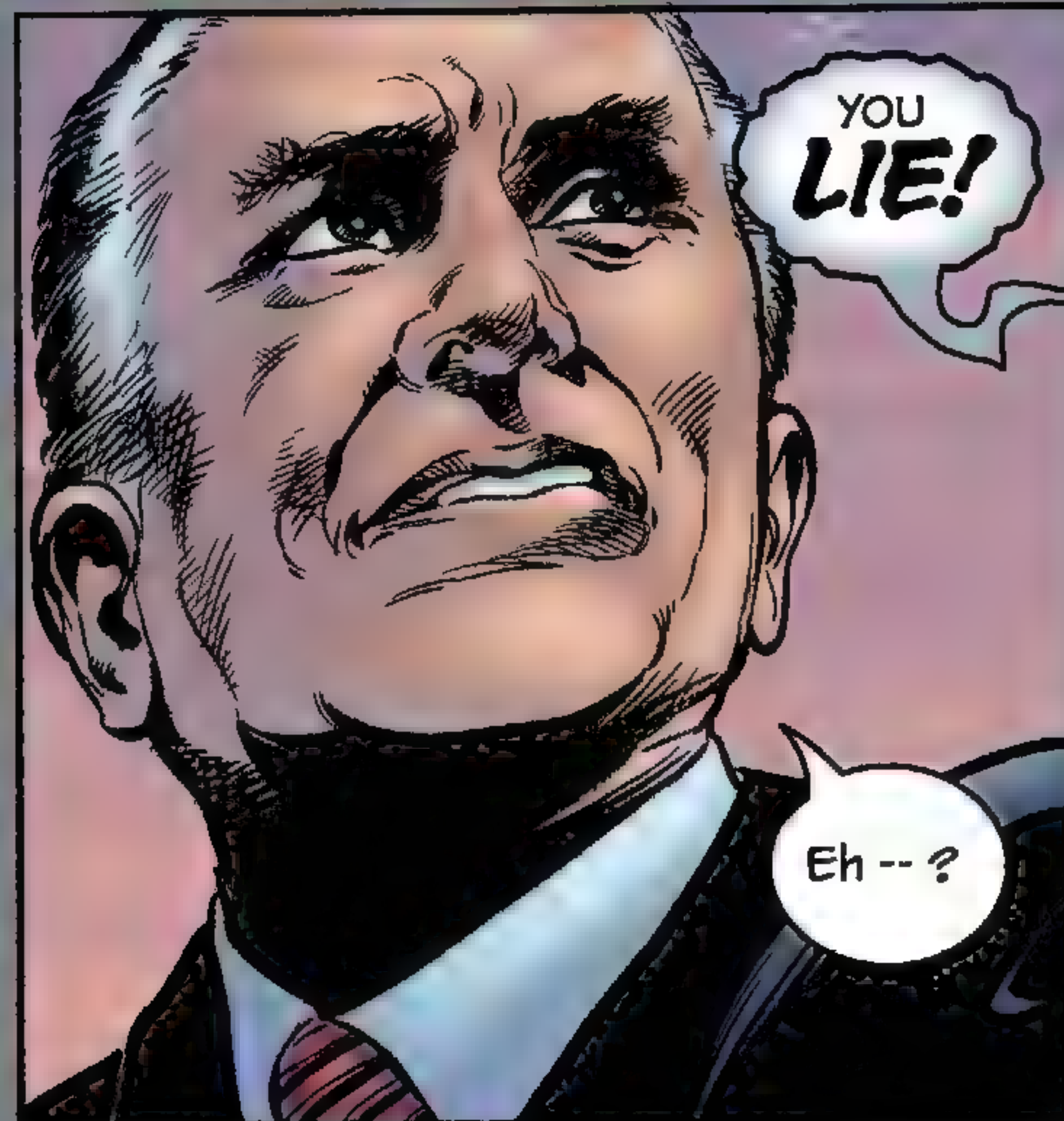
-- THEY HADN'T IMAGINED SOMETHING LIKE **THIS** --



-- BUT THEN THE **MAYOR** CAME TO THE **PODIUM**, TO CALM THEM DOWN --

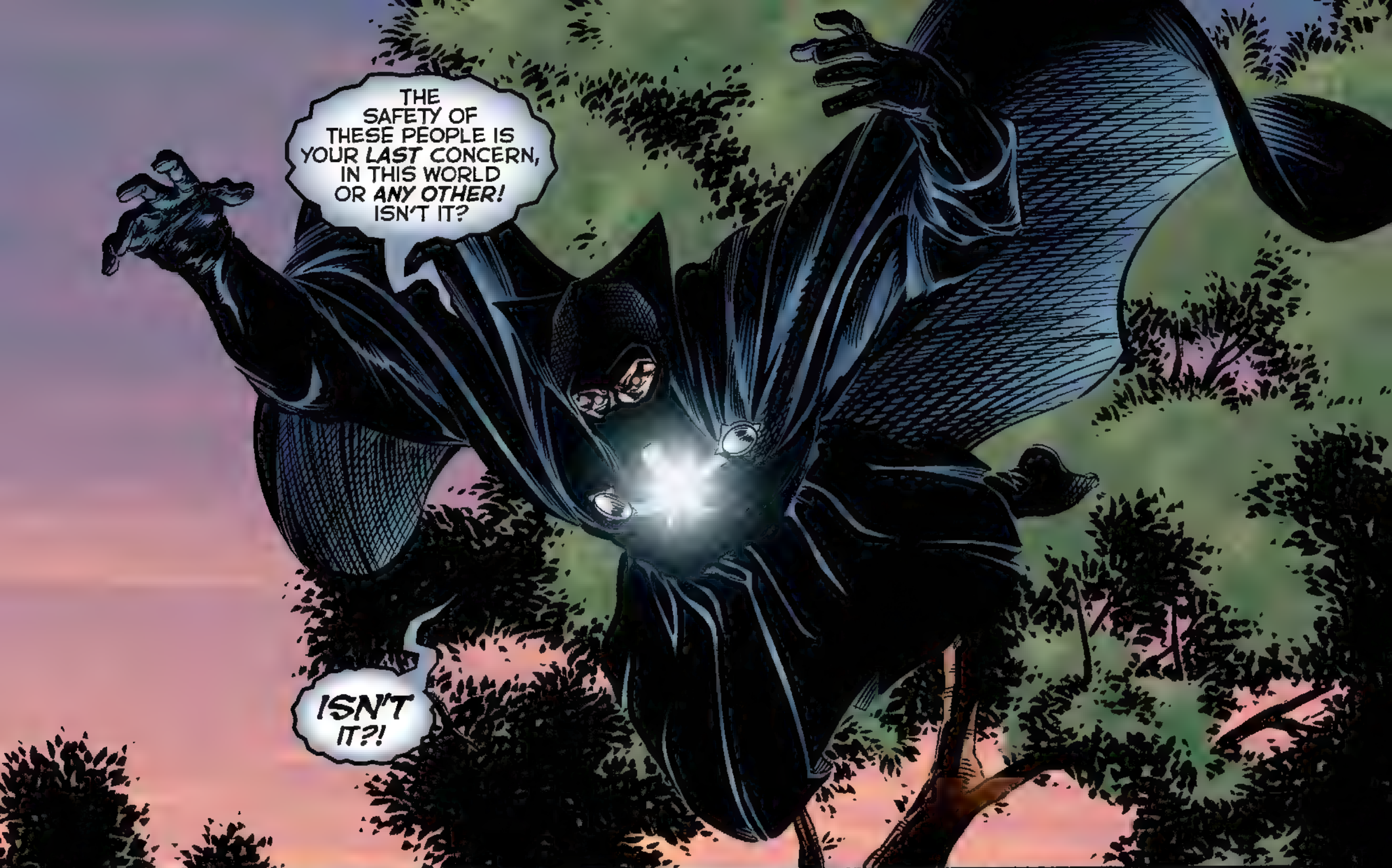
MY FELLOW **ASTRO CITIZENS!** YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR! THIS IS MERELY A **PROTECTIVE MEASURE** --

-- TO **GUARANTEE YOUR SAFETY** AS WE --



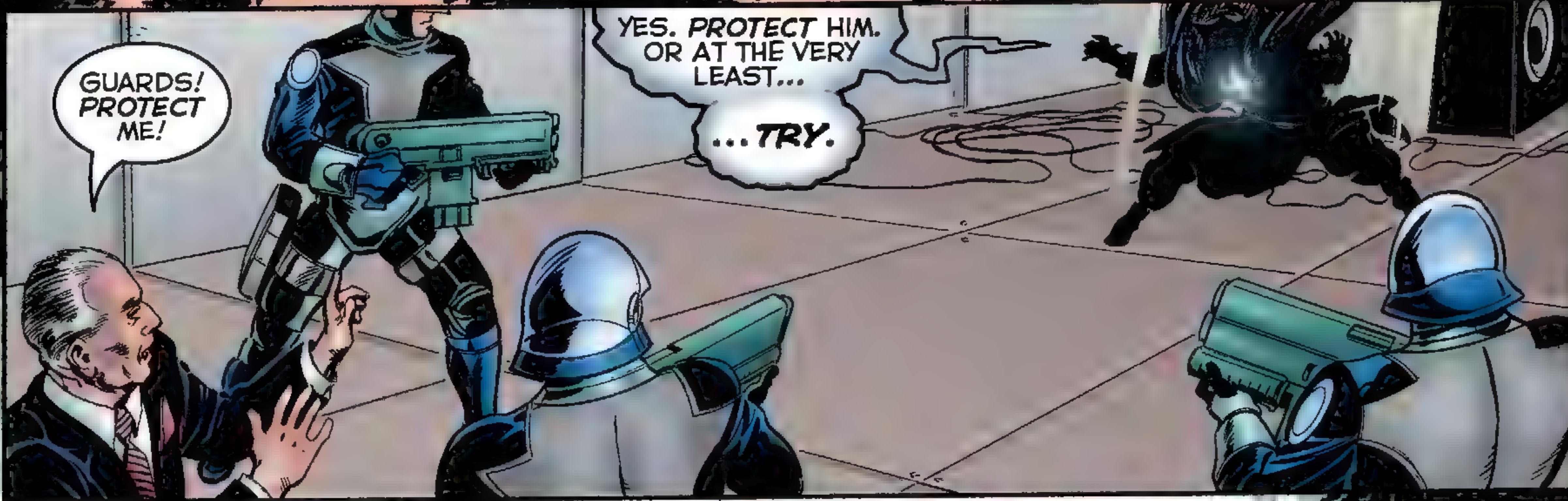
YOU **LIE!**

Eh -- ?



THE
SAFETY OF
THESE PEOPLE IS
YOUR LAST CONCERN,
IN THIS WORLD
OR ANY OTHER!
ISN'T IT?

ISN'T
IT?!



GUARDS!
PROTECT
ME!

YES. PROTECT HIM.
OR AT THE VERY
LEAST...
...TRY.



I GOT THERE JUST AS
THE FIGHT STARTED. HIM
ALONE, AGAINST A DOZEN
E.A.G.L.E. TROOPERS --

-- WITH WORSE
COMING OFF
THE SHIPS
EVERY MINUTE.

HE PLOWED INTO
THEM WITH TOTAL
ABANDON, LIKE
HE JUST DIDN'T
CARE ABOUT HIS
OWN SAFETY
ANY MORE.

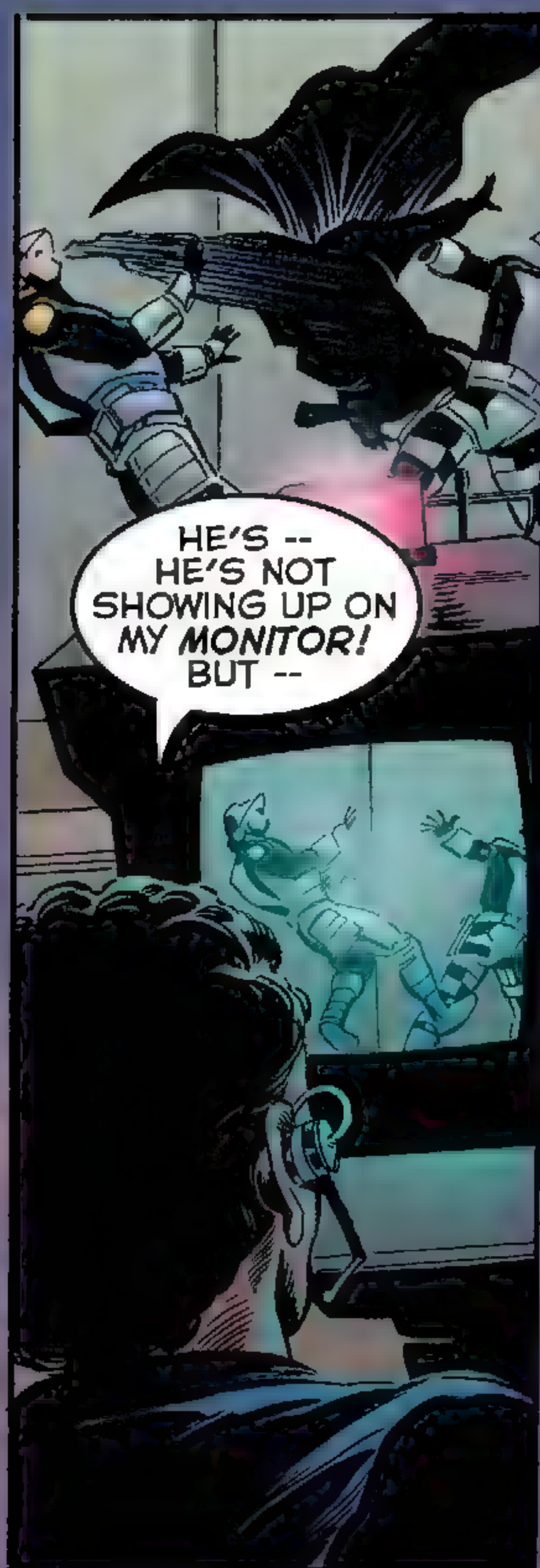


CHOOOM

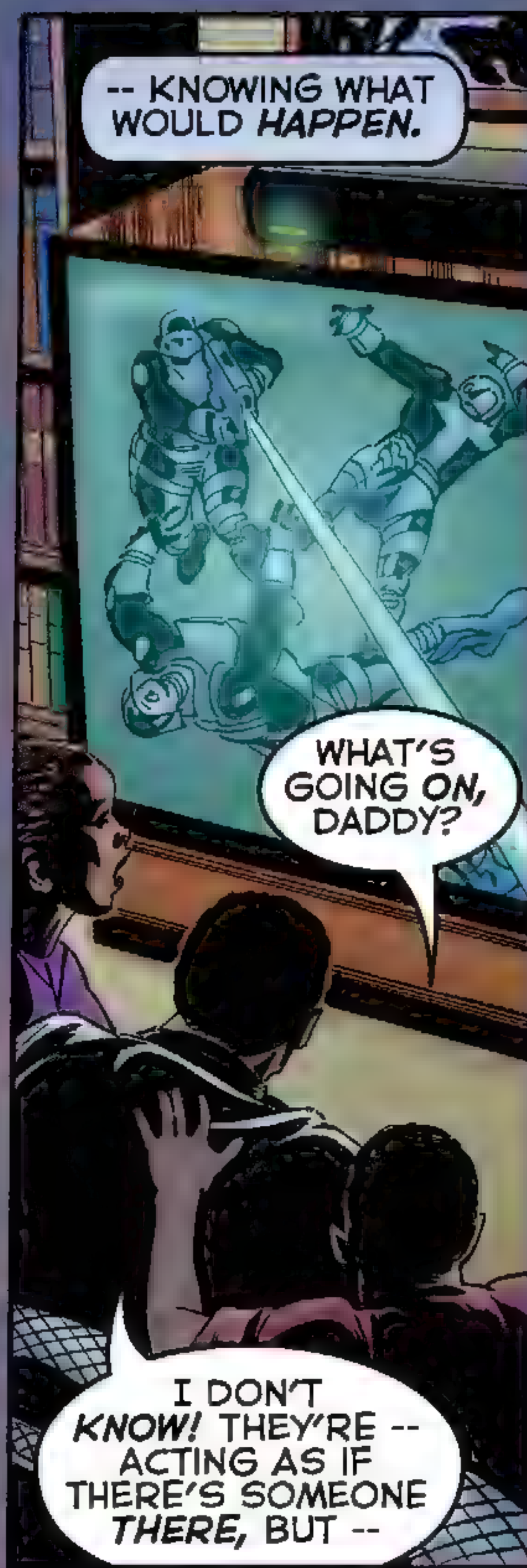
KRAK

CHOOOM

AND HE HAD TO KNOW
WHAT HE WAS DOING.
HE HAD TO. LEAPING IN
FRONT OF ALL THOSE
TELEVISION CAMERAS --



HE'S --
HE'S NOT
SHOWING UP ON
MY MONITOR!
BUT --



-- KNOWING WHAT
WOULD HAPPEN.

WHAT'S
GOING ON,
DADDY?

I DON'T
KNOW! THEY'RE --
ACTING AS IF
THERE'S SOMEONE
THERE, BUT --



AND
WORSE --

DEPLOY
HOLO-
CRUCIFIXES,
MEN!

-- HE HAD TO
KNOW THEY'D
BE READY
FOR HIM.

THE CROSS ON HIS
COSTUME HURT HIM --
GAVE HIM PAIN TO
FOCUS ON, TO DULL
HIS THIRST. HOW
MUCH WORSE, THEN --

AAAAARRH!



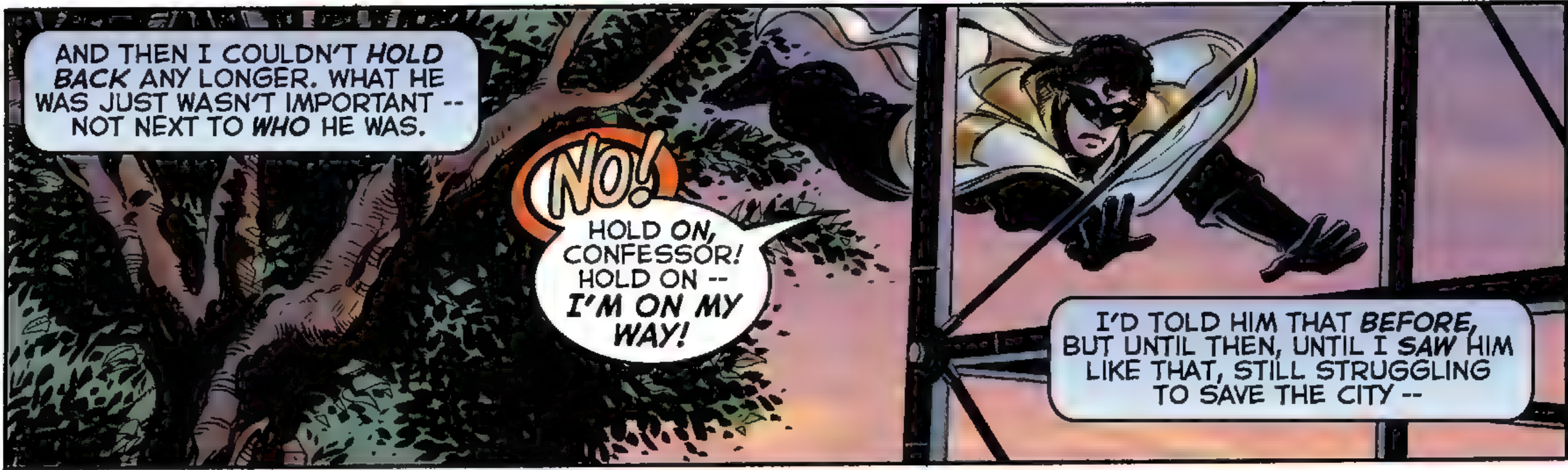
-- WAS THE PAIN
FROM A DOZEN
CRUCIFIXES?

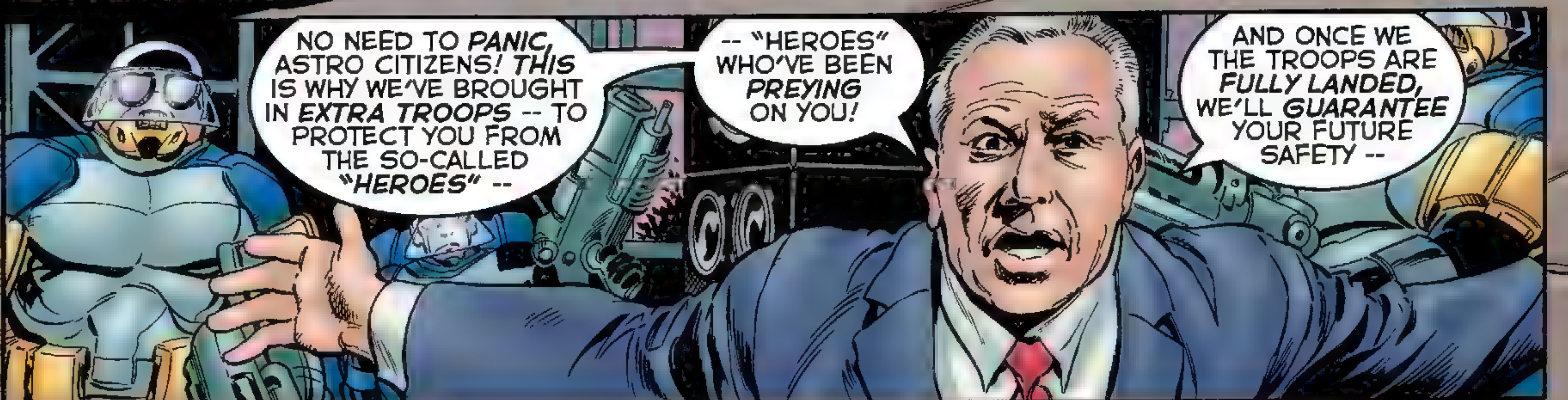
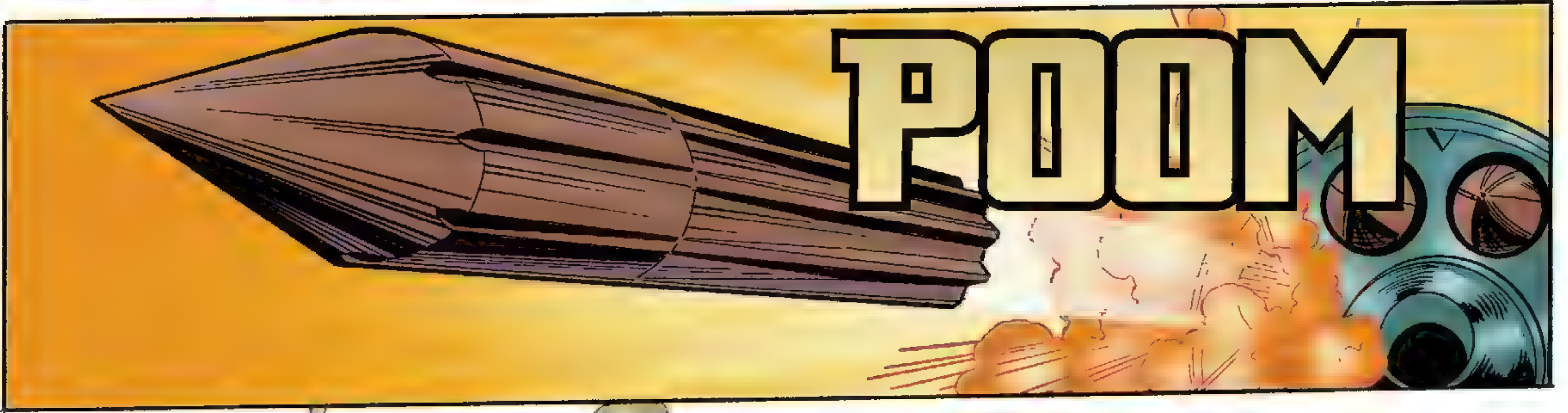
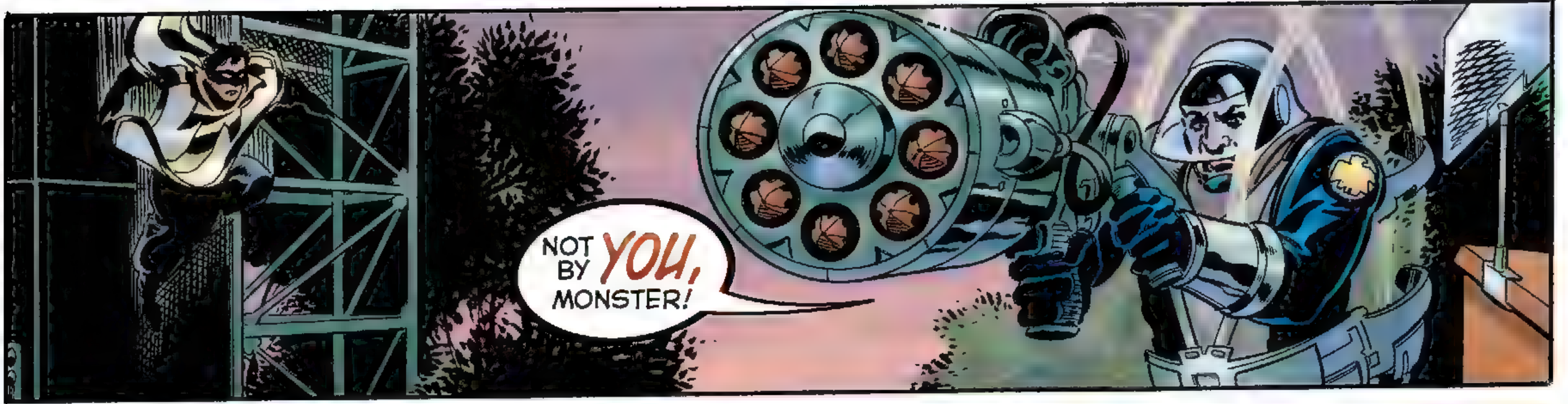


THERE,
YOU SEE?

THE HEROES
TRIED TO HAVE ME
SILENCED, BUT I WAS
RIGHT ALL ALONG!
HE'S THE SHADOW
HILL KILLER --

-- IT'S
BEEN ONE
OF THEM ALL
ALONG!

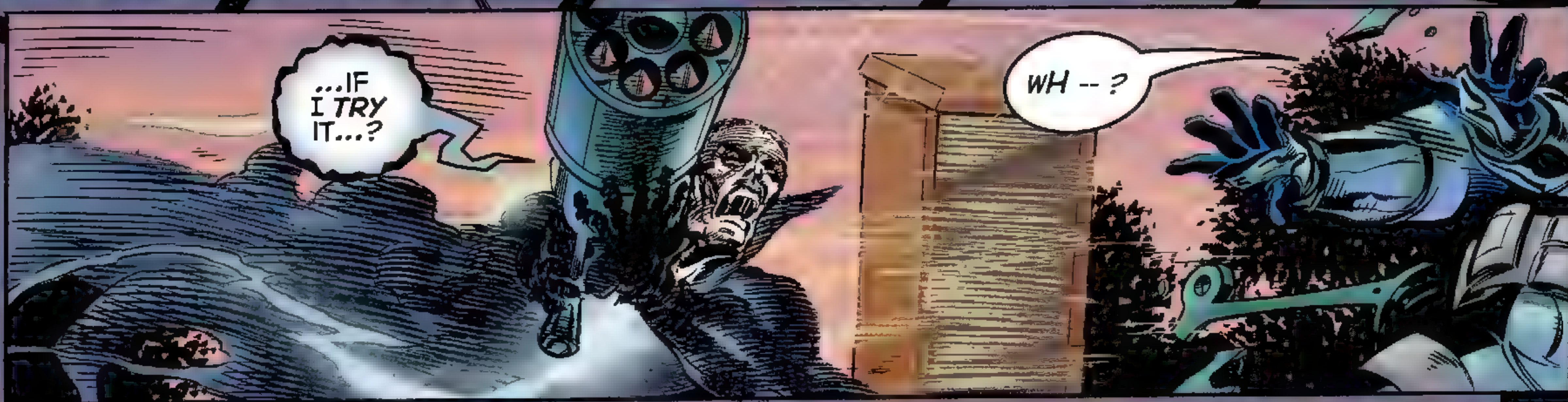






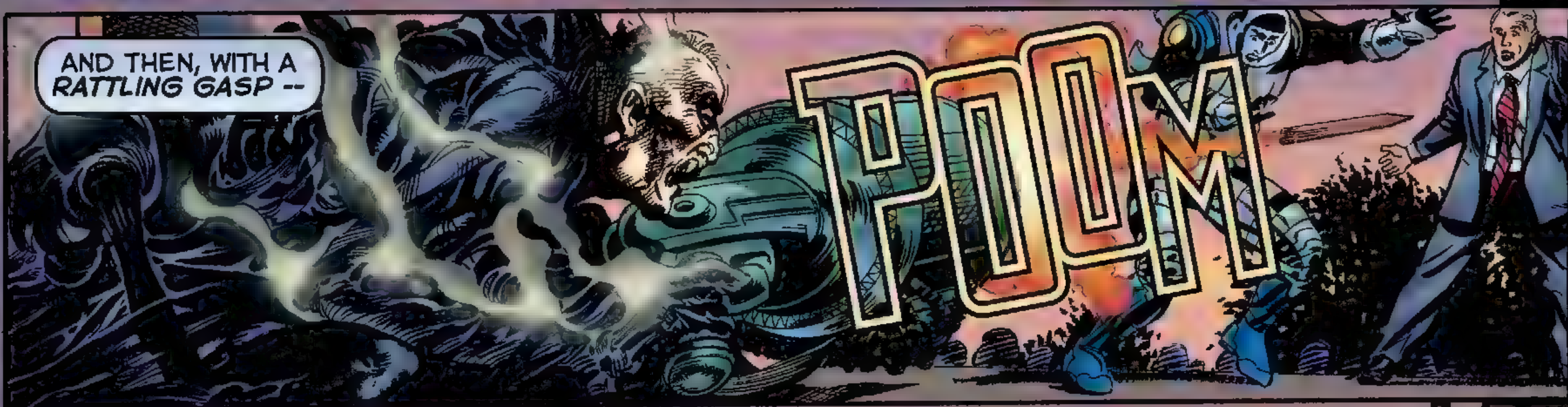
NICE...NICE
WEAPON...

MIND
IF...



...IF
I TRY
IT...?

WH -- ?



AND THEN, WITH A
RATTLING GASP --

POOM



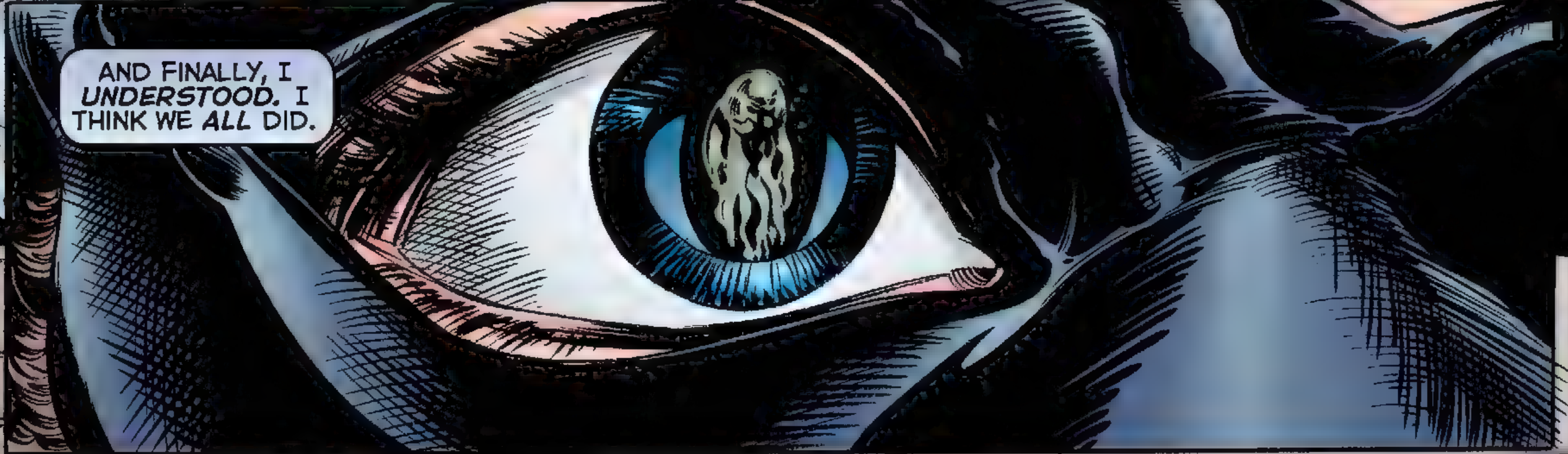
-HKK-



SIR!

THE
MAYOR!

HE'S --





I UNDERSTOOD WHY
THE ALIEN SHAPESHIFTER
HAD BEEN DISCREDITING
CRACKERJACK, AND
MAYBE WINGED VICTORY
AS WELL.

I UNDERSTOOD
WHY THE MAYOR
USED THE SHADOW
HILL CRISIS TO
TURN THE PUBLIC
AGAINST THE
HEROES.

I UNDERSTOOD WHY
THE HEROES HAD BEEN
CAPTURED, KILLED,
OR CHASED AWAY.

AND I UNDERSTOOD
WHAT THE "SPECIAL
TROOPS" WERE FOR.



NOT THAT
UNDERSTANDING
ANY OF IT WAS
GOING TO DO
ME ANY GOOD.



אָן טאַטאַן פֿון
זיין אַרבעט אַרבעט
אָרבעט אַרבעט, און אַרבעט
אָרבעט אַרבעט אַרבעט
אָרבעט אַרבעט — — עס
אַרבעט אַרבעט
אַרבעט אַרבעט

CHK

CHK

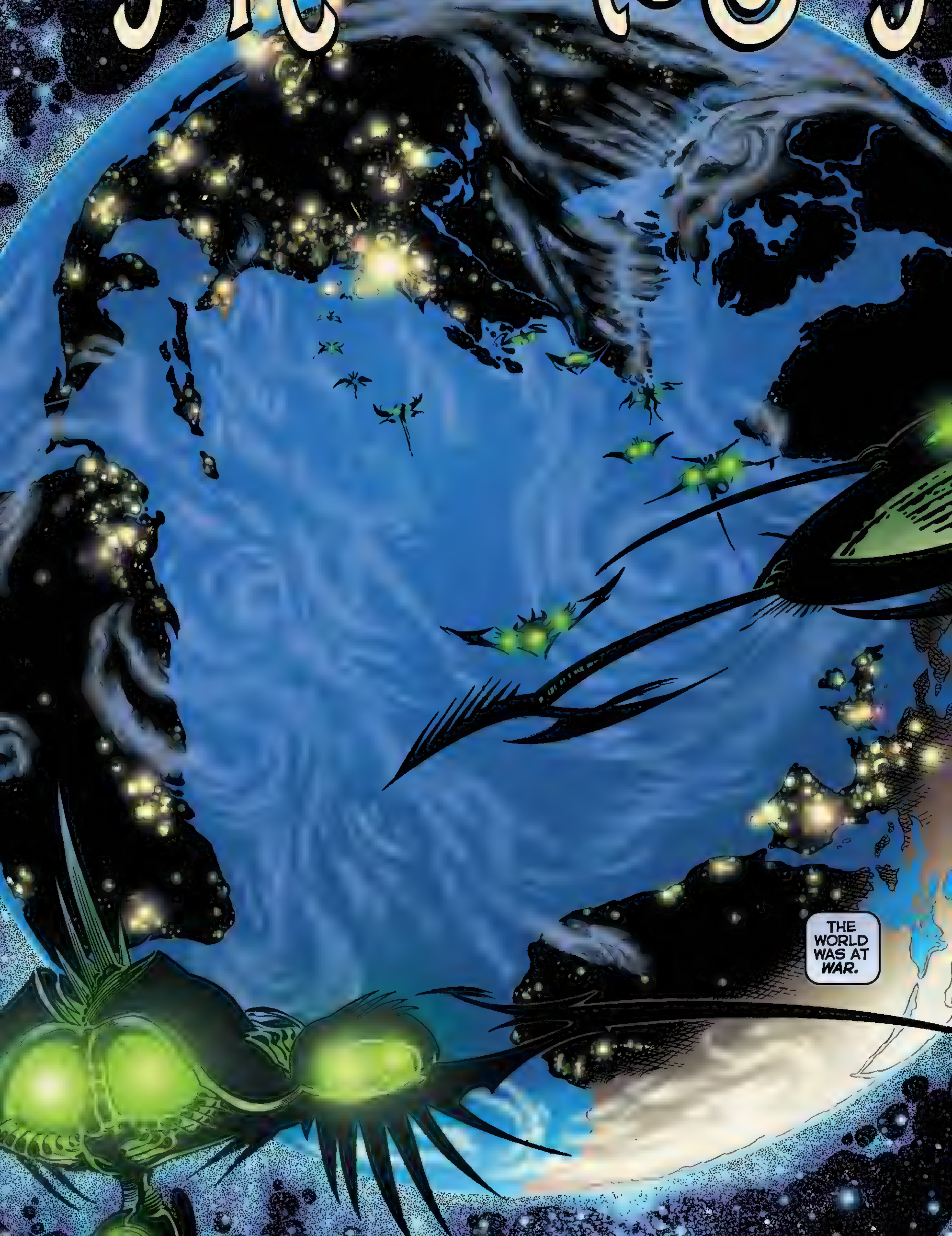





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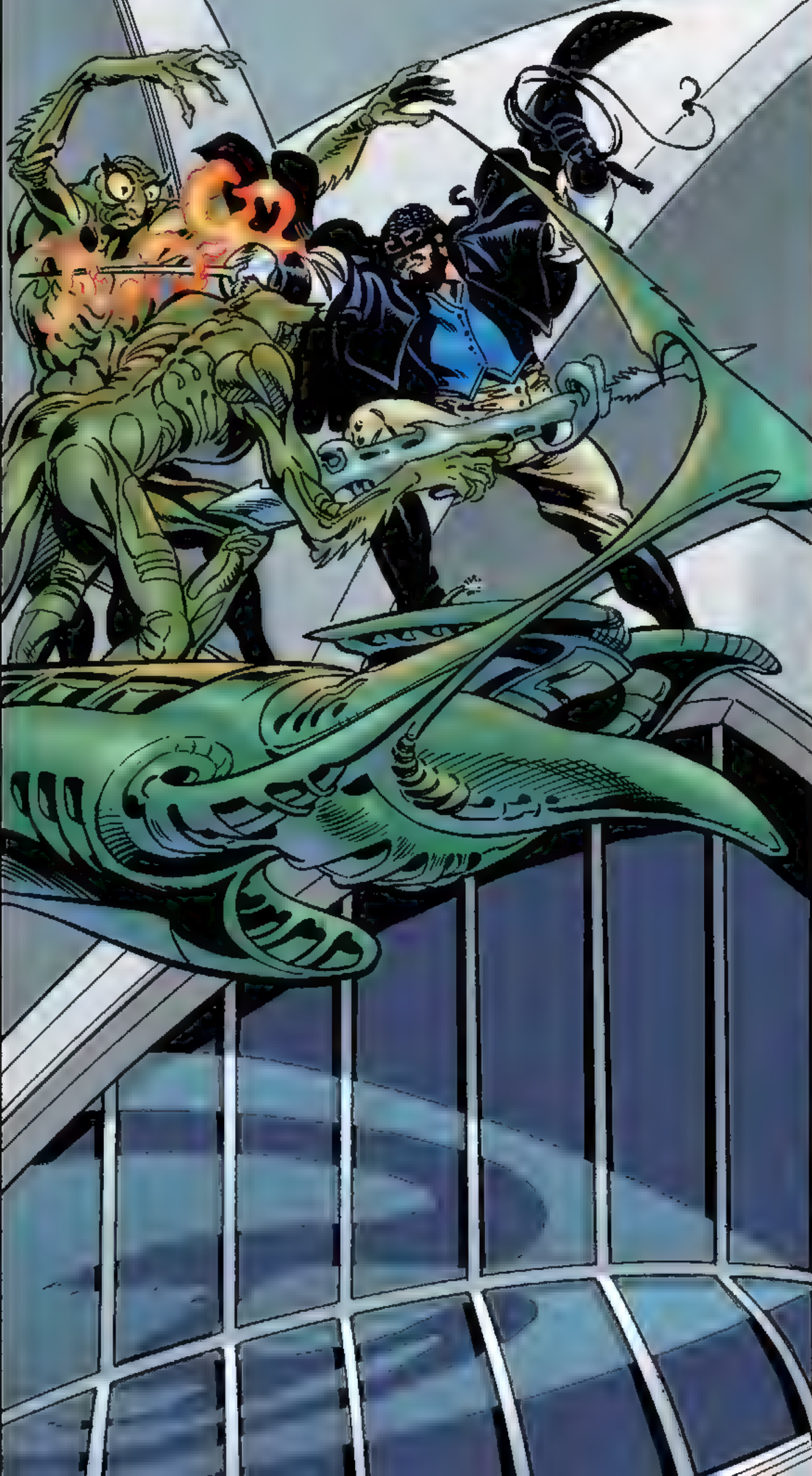
MY FATHER'S SON



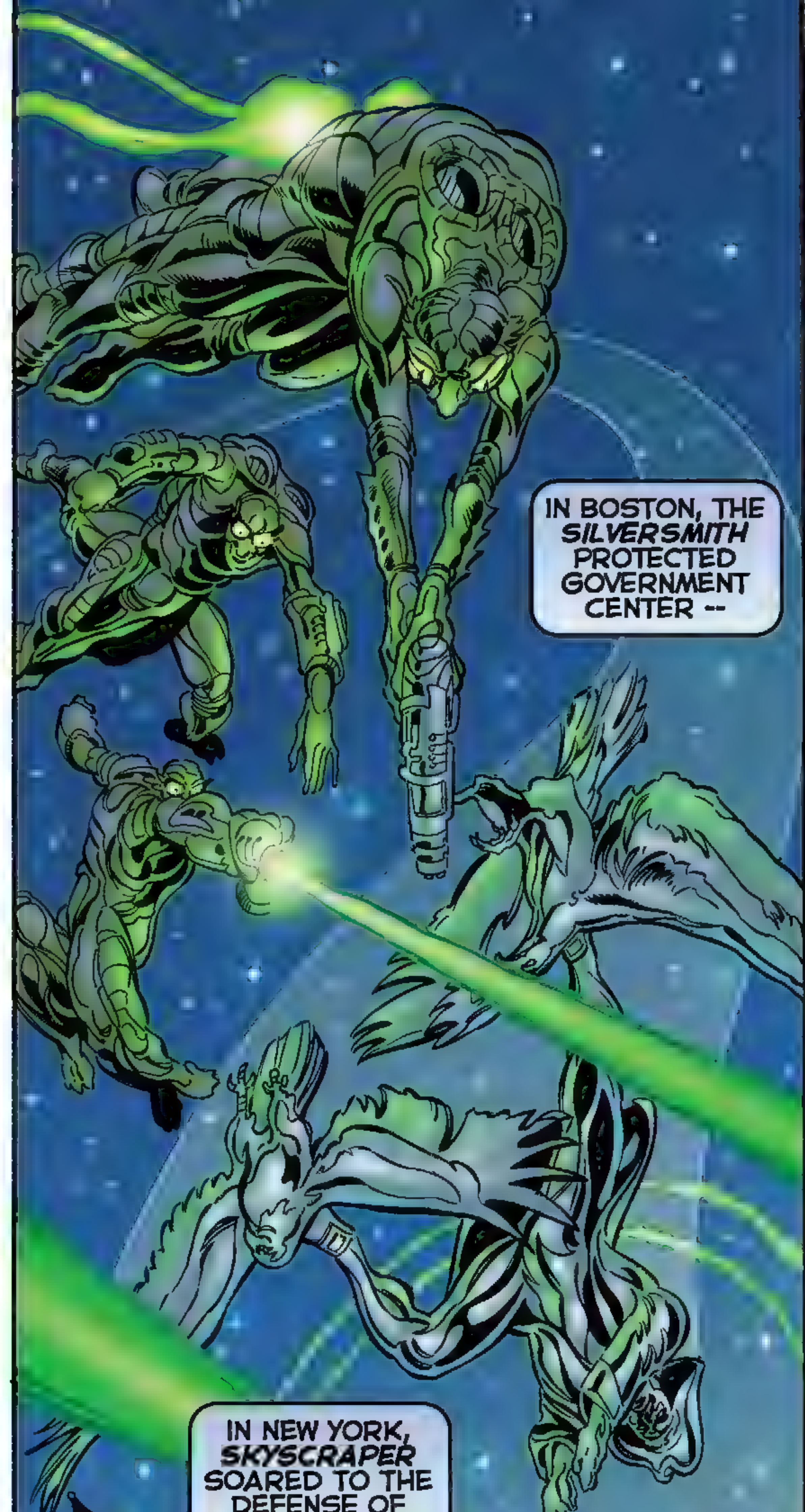
THE
WORLD
WAS AT
WAR.




IN SYDNEY, THE COLONIAL
AND BULLROARER STAVED
OFF A SQUADRON OF
ATTACK CRAFT --



-- WHILE KOOKABURRA
AND BARRIER RALLIED
THE OTHER AUSTRALIAN
HEROES IN CANBERRA.



IN BOSTON, THE
SILVERSMITH
PROTECTED
GOVERNMENT
CENTER --



IN NEW YORK,
SKYSCRAPER
SOARED TO THE
DEFENSE OF
MANHATTAN --

IN ATLANTA,
THE REAL
THING LOOMED
OVER THE CITY,
SWATTING
GUNSHIPS OUT
OF THE SKY --

IN CHICAGO,
IT WAS THE
UNTOUCHABLE --

AND SO IT
WENT, AROUND
THE WORLD.

IN RIO DE JANEIRO, THE
BIRDS OF PARADISE
SANK SEVERAL
AIRBORNE CARRIERS IN
GUANABARA BAY --

IN KENYA,
ANANSI SPUN
ILLUSIONS
TO FOOL THE
INVADERS --

IN STUTTGART,
THE GUNS OF
IRON CROSS
TOOK A TOLL --



EVEN THE TROLLS
OF *GLITTERTINDEN*
JOINED THE FRAY,
FREEZING LAND-CRAFT
AND SENDING THEM
TO THE BOTTOM OF
HORTENSFJORD.

ALL ACROSS
THE PLANET, THE
HEROES, VILLAINS,
MONSTERS AND
CREATURES OF
EARTH ROSE TO
DEFEND THEIR
HOME --

AND
ASTRO
CITY --

ASTRO CITY WAS WHERE THE INVASION WAS MOST CONCENTRATED.

HONOR GUARD HAD BROKEN OUT OF THE CORDON AROUND THEIR HEADQUARTERS, AND MET THE MAIN ATTACK OF THE ENELSIANS -- AS WE LATER LEARNED THEY WERE CALLED -- HEAD-ON.

THE HANGED MAN WALKED OFF SHADOW HILL.

THE FIRST FAMILY SIDE-STEPPED THROUGH DIMENSIONS TO FREE THEMSELVES --

-- THEN BEGAN ANALYZING CAPTURED ARMAMENTS, HOPING TO FIND A WAY TO DESTROY THE ENEMIES' WEAPONS FROM A DISTANCE.

CRACKERJACK SPRUNG HIMSELF AND MEMBERS OF THE IRREGULARS OUT OF JAIL, AND DEALT WITH GROUND TROOPS.

THE GENTLEMAN AND WINGED VICTORY MADE SURE FALLING SHIPS DIDN'T DAMAGE THE CITY.

EVERYONE -- NIGHTINGALE, SUNBIRD, THE OTHERS -- DID THEIR PART.

AND AS FOR ME --



I'D JUST SEEN THE
CONFESSOR SACRIFICE
HIS LIFE TO EXPOSE THE
ALIENS IN OUR MIDST --

-- AND WAS
ABOUT TO DIE
MYSELF --

-- 70
ΠΑΓΩΣΤΗΝ
ΑΓΙΟΝ
ΕΣΤΑΝΤΗ!!

Uh --



-- WHEN THE
STAGE ERUPTED
BENEATH ME --



-- AND I WAS SAVED
BY AN ANGEL.

RELAX,
ALTAR BOY!
IT'S HARDER
TO CARRY
YOU IF YOU
STRUGGLE!

Wh --
wh --
THE
CROSSBREED?!



PETER! SHIELD
THE CROWD!
DANIEL, DAVID,
JOSHUA --

-- SMITE
THEM!

HRRR





I HAD TO
HELP -- HAD
TO PITCH IN --

KRAK



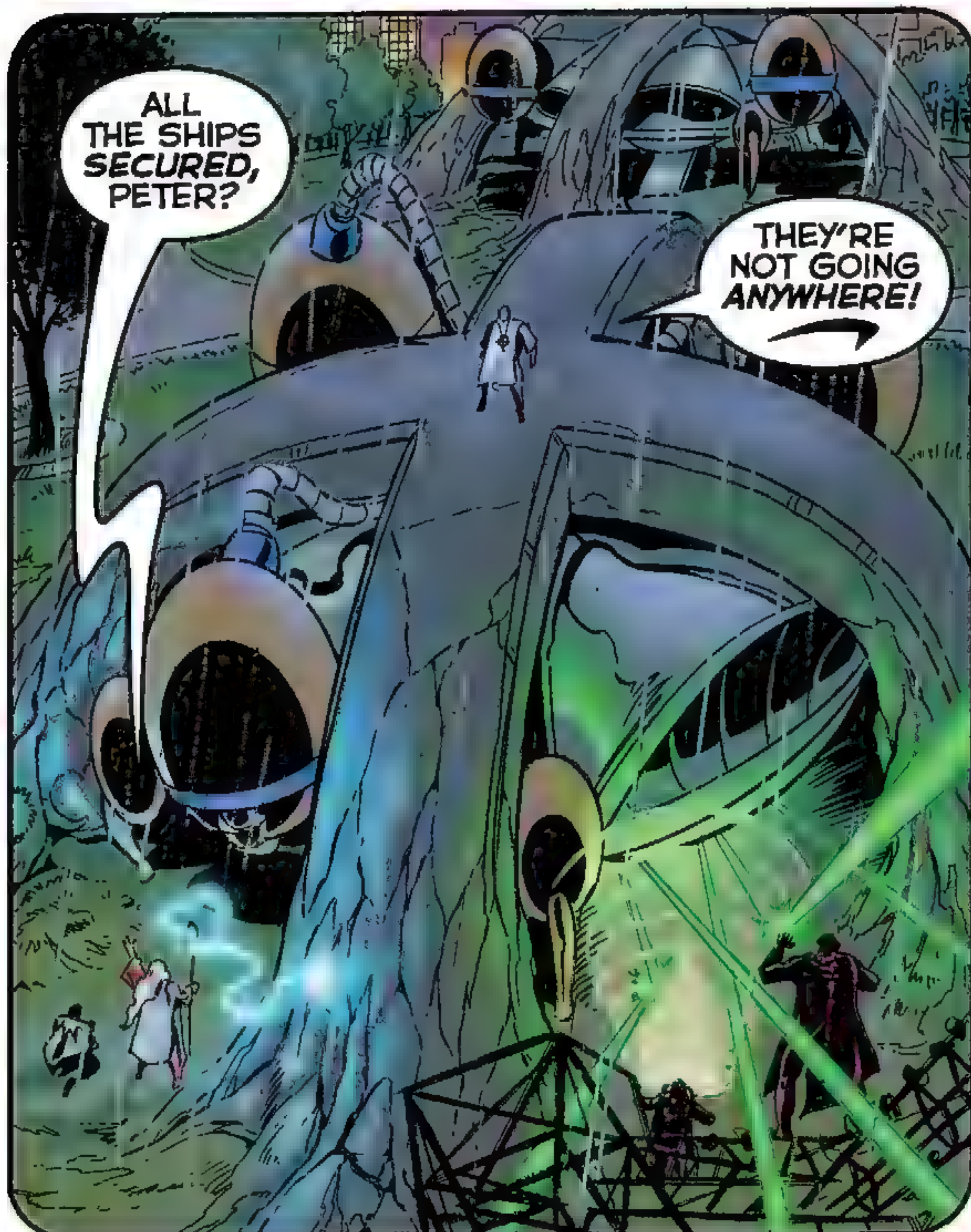
-- BUT --

AHH!



YOU'RE
STILL IN **SHOCK**,
MY SON. YOU ARE
IN NO SHAPE TO
DO BATTLE. JUST
REST -- LET US
TAKE CARE OF
THIS.

WE ARE
SIMPLY GIVING THE
POPULACE -- AND
THE **HUMAN TROOPS** --
TIME TO GET OUT OF THE
PARK, IN ANY CASE.
ONCE **THAT'S**
DONE --



ALL
THE SHIPS
SECURED,
PETER?

THEY'RE
NOT GOING
ANYWHERE!

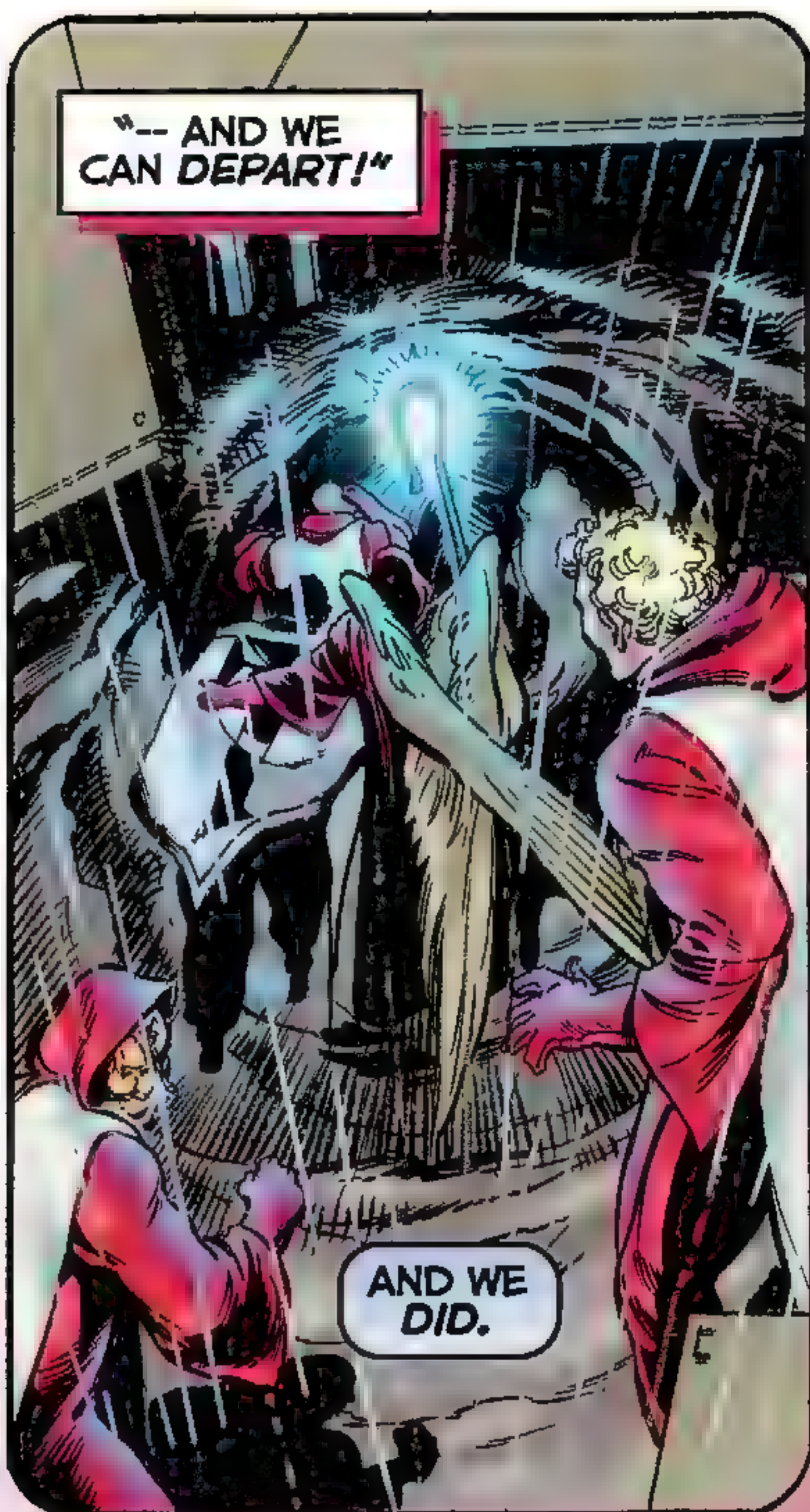


KRAK KRAK

KRAK

GOOD. A FEW
THUNDERBOLTS
TO SEAL THE
HATCHWAYS --

"-- AND WE
CAN DEPART!"



AND WE
DID.

PETER'S ROCK-SHAPING
POWERS CUT THROUGH THE
BEDROCK BELOW THE CITY
LIKE IT WAS NOTHING --



-- CARRYING US
AWAY FROM THE
PARK, AWAY FROM
THE THREAT.

I SHOULD HAVE
FELT SAFE.

INSTEAD, ALL I COULD
THINK OF WAS THE DARK
AND THE COLD -- AND
MILLIONS OF TONS OF ROCK,
PRESSING IN ON US --



ALL I
COULD
THINK
OF --

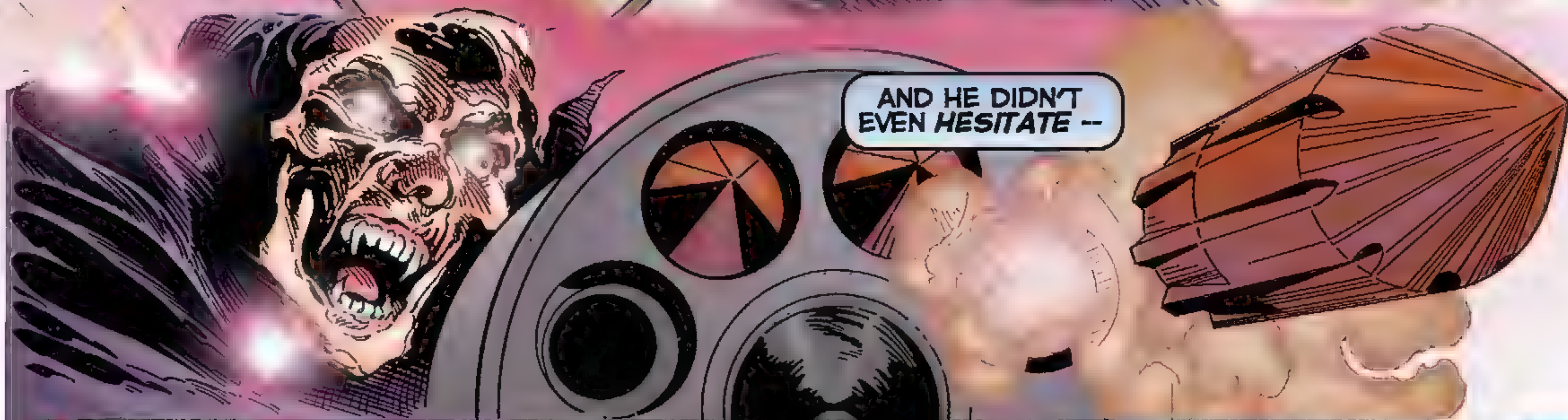
-- WAS THE
CONFESSOR.

I'D SEEN HIM -- SEEN
HIS SKIN BURN, HIS
FLESH SHRIVEL AWAY --



AND HE KNEW --
HE KNEW IT
WOULD HAPPEN --

AND HE DIDN'T
EVEN HESITATE --



ALTAR BOY?
YOU'RE
SHAKING!

HE HAS BEEN
THROUGH A
GREAT DEAL, MARY.
HE NEEDS WARMTH,
NEEDS HIS WOUND
ATTENDED TO.
FORTUNATELY --





-- WE ARE
ALMOST
HOME.

WE CAME UP UNDER
THE WATERFRONT, BY THE
RIVERSIDE DOCKS --



-- AND I
REALIZED --

THIS --
THIS IS WHERE
YOU WERE, ALL
ALONG? YOU
NEVER LEFT?

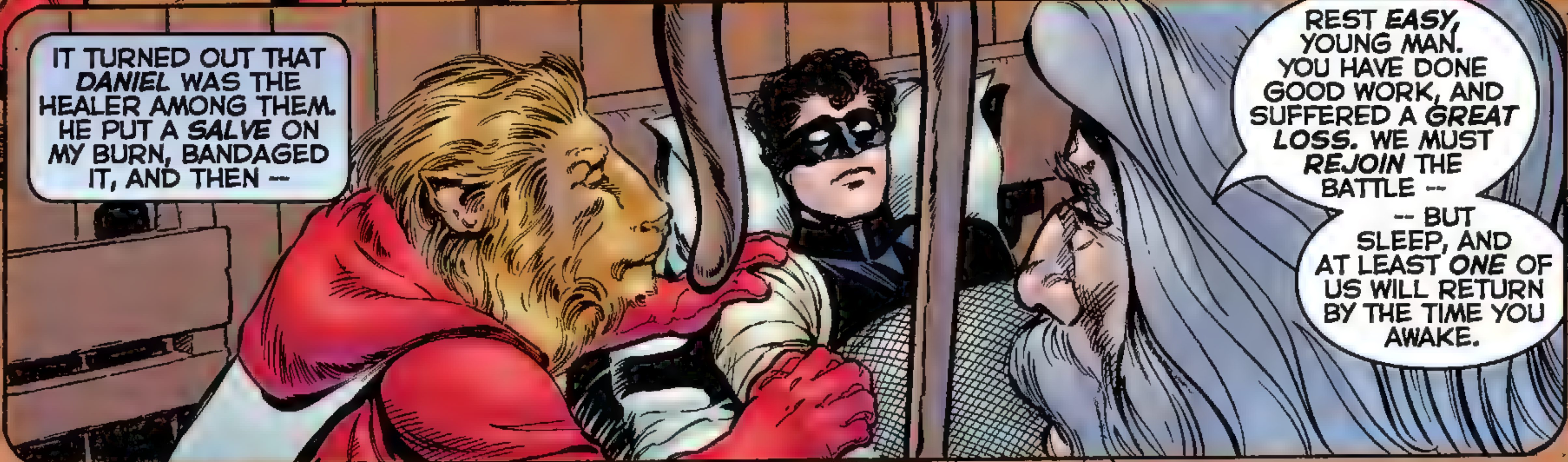
NO, MY
SON --



-- IT WAS CLEAR
THAT WE WERE
UNWELCOME --

-- SO WE WENT
TO GROUND, ONLY
EMERGING ONLY
TO OBTAIN
SUPPLIES.

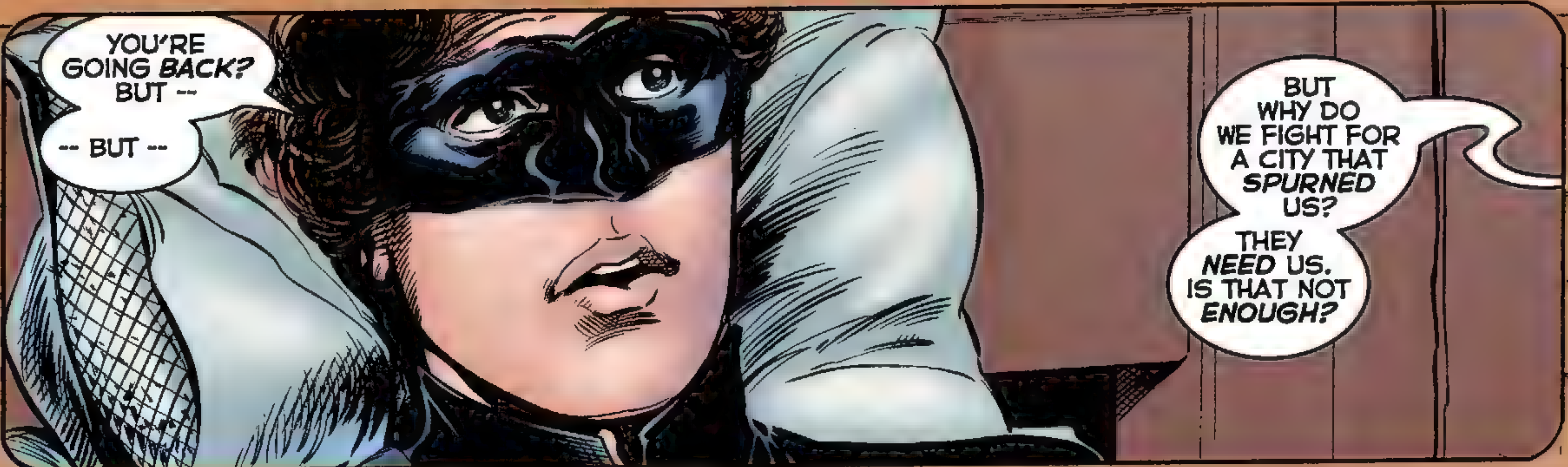
BUT
ENOUGH TALK.
LET'S SEE TO
YOUR ARM.



IT TURNED OUT THAT
DANIEL WAS THE
HEALER AMONG THEM.
HE PUT A SALVE ON
MY BURN, BANDAGED
IT, AND THEN --

REST EASY,
YOUNG MAN.
YOU HAVE DONE
GOOD WORK, AND
SUFFERED A GREAT
LOSS. WE MUST
REJOIN THE
BATTLE --

-- BUT
SLEEP, AND
AT LEAST ONE OF
US WILL RETURN
BY THE TIME YOU
AWAKE.



YOU'RE
GOING BACK?
BUT --

-- BUT --

BUT
WHY DO
WE FIGHT FOR
A CITY THAT
SPURNED
US?

THEY
NEED US.
IS THAT NOT
ENOUGH?



BUT --
THEY THREW
ROCKS AT YOU!
THEY DROVE YOU
AWAY!

HOW
CAN YOU JUST
IGNORE -- ?

WE IGNORE
NOTHING, MY
SON. BUT WE ARE
HERE TO SPREAD
GOD'S WORD. IF WE
ONLY SPREAD IT
TO THOSE WHO
ARE ALREADY
LISTENING --

-- WHAT
GOOD WOULD
WE BE?

AND THEN -- I
HAD TO ASK. I
HAD TO KNOW.

YOU RESCUED
ME. BUT -- THE
CONFESSOR --


I REGRET
THAT WE WERE
UNABLE TO SAVE
HIM, TOO. WE CAME
AS SOON AS HE
ATTACKED, AND WE
REALIZED THE
TRUTH, BUT --

THAT HE WAS A
VAMPIRE? YES, WE
KNEW. WE HAVE KNOWN
FOR SOME YEARS.
TO THE RIGHT EYES,
THE TOUCH OF THE
UNDEAD CANNOT
BE HIDDEN.

BUT
REGARDLESS
OF WHAT HE
WAS, HE WAS
DOING GOD'S
WORK --


-- HE WAS SAVING
INNOCENTS AND
SERVING TRUTH. AND
IN THE FINAL JUDGMENT,
WHAT IS MORE
IMPORTANT? THE
BURDENS WE
BEAR --

-- OR
THE WAY
WE BEAR
THEM?

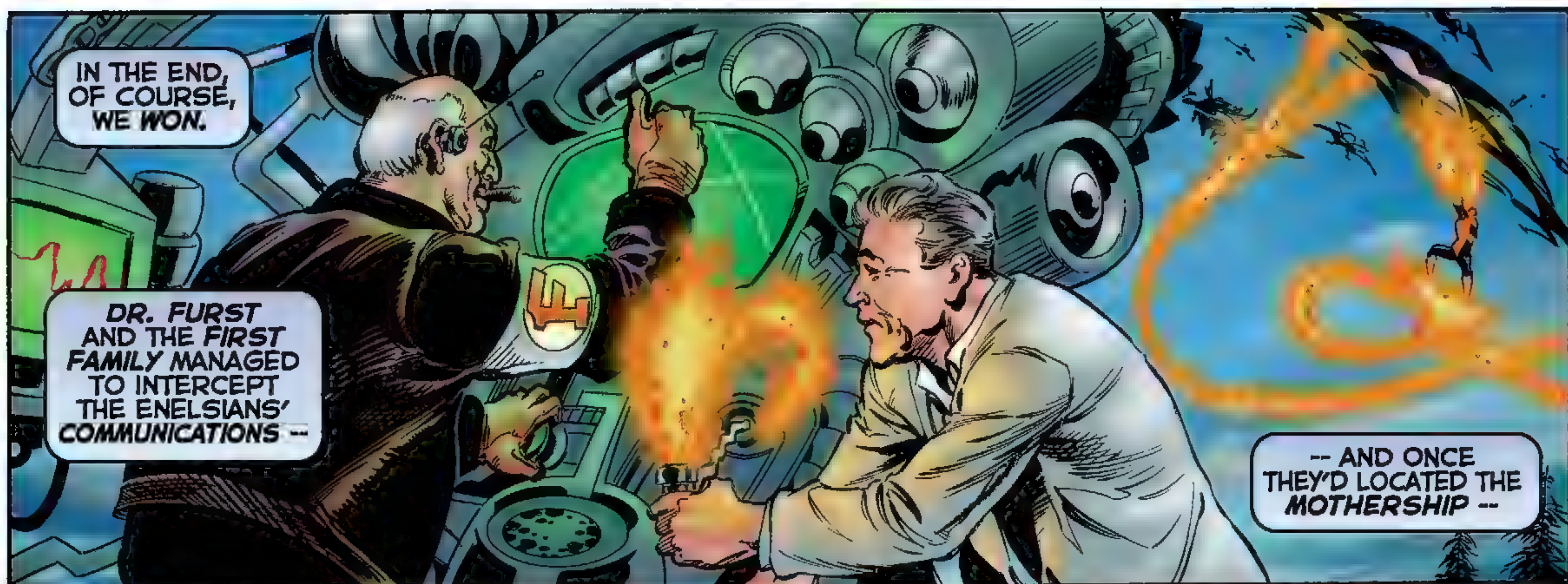


AND -- IT
HAD NOTHING
TO DO WITH THE
FACT THAT
HE'S -- THAT HE
WAS -- ?

AND WITH
THAT --



-- THEY LEFT ME
ALONE WITH MY
THOUGHTS.



IN THE END,
OF COURSE,
WE WON.

DR. FURST
AND THE FIRST
FAMILY MANAGED
TO INTERCEPT
THE ENELSIANS'
COMMUNICATIONS --

-- AND ONCE
THEY'D LOCATED THE
MOTHERSHIP --



-- SAMARITAN,
WINGED VICTORY,
AND THE GENTLEMAN
CAPTURED IT --



-- AND FORCED
THE SUPREME
COMMANDRIX
TO ORDER A
RETREAT.

THEY WOULDN'T
BE COMING
BACK, EITHER.



THERE WAS
SOMETHING ABOUT
A GALACTIC COUNCIL,
AND STARWOMAN'S
PEOPLE --

MOSTLY WHAT
WE CARED ABOUT,
THOUGH, WAS THAT
THEY WERE GONE.

-- I NEVER GOT THE
DETAILS STRAIGHT.
BUT WHATEVER IT WAS,
THE ENELSIANS WERE
IN A LOT OF TROUBLE.

SAMARITAN HAD FOUND THE REAL MAYOR STEVENSON, TOO, IMPRISONED ON THE MOTHERSHIP --

-- ALONG WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS FROM 45 OTHER CITIES AND COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE.

THANK YOU, THANK YOU. IT'S GOOD TO BE... HERE.

OFFICE of the MAYOR of ASTRO CITY

I'D LIKE TO THANK THE HEROES OF ASTRO CITY -- OF THE WORLD -- FOR THEIR UNWAVERING FAITH, EVEN DURING THIS ORDEAL.

AND I'D LIKE TO APOLOGIZE TO THEM --

-- FOR WHAT THEY'VE SUFFERED IN MY NAME.

THE MAYOR WENT ON, TO PRAISE THE SWIFT REACTION OF E.A.G.L.E., NATIONAL GUARD AND ARMY UNITS, BACKING UP THE HEROES --

-- AND TO PROMISE SWIFT REPAIR OF THE DAMAGE TO THE CITY.

AND THEN THE NEWSCAST WENT ON, TOO --

NEIGHBORHOOD WATCH GROUPS IN THE SHADOW HILL AREA ARE STANDING DOWN, AS WELL --

-- APPARENTLY SATISFIED THAT WITH THE DEATH OF THE CONFESSOR --

-- THE THREAT OF THE SHADOW HILL KILLER IS ENDED.

AUTHORITIES ARE BAFFLED AS TO WHY HE ATTACKED THE FALSE MAYOR STEVENSON, INDIRECTLY EXPOSING THE ALIENS --

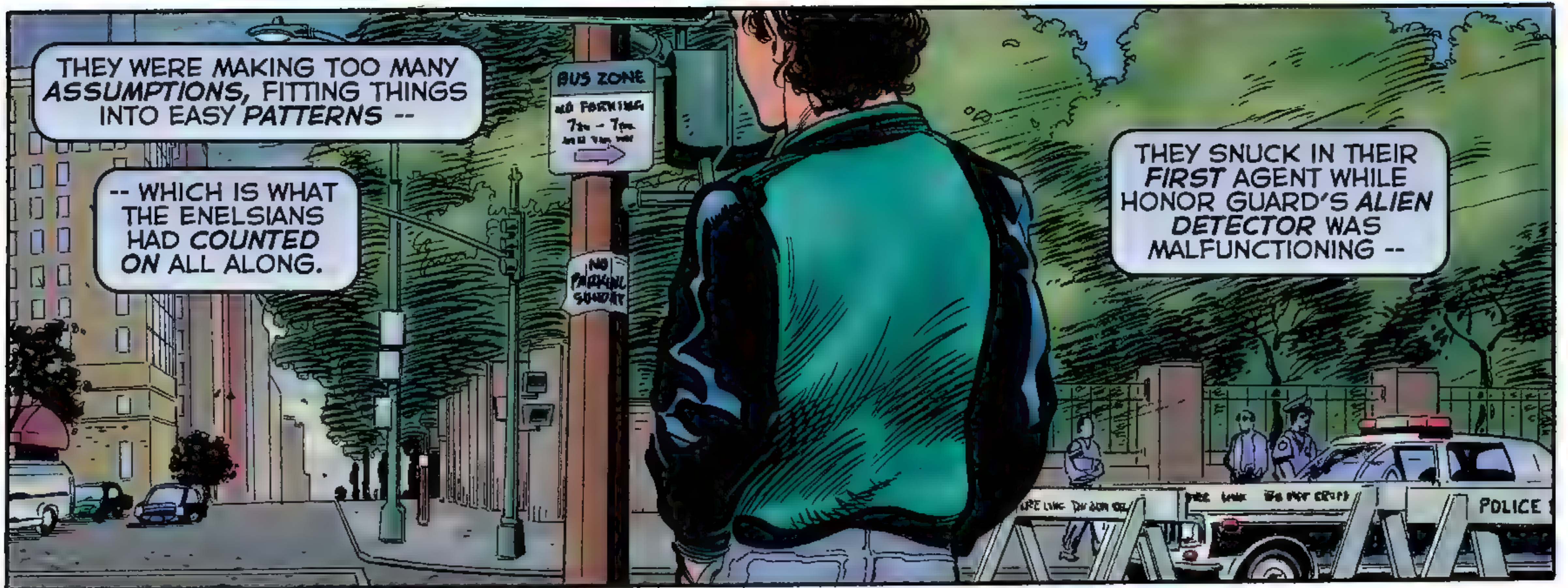
-- BUT DEBATES BETWEEN F.B.U.'S SUPERHUMAN STUDIES AND THEOLOGICAL DEPARTMENTS HAVE BEEN SPIRITED --

-- AND A DEFINITIVE ANSWER IS EXPECTED WITHIN A WEEK.

Hey! HDTV is HERE!

Low Prices!

THEY'D NEVER FIGURE IT OUT. I KNEW THAT.



THEY WERE MAKING TOO MANY ASSUMPTIONS, FITTING THINGS INTO EASY PATTERNS --

-- WHICH IS WHAT THE ENELSIANS HAD COUNTED ON ALL ALONG.

THEY SNUCK IN THEIR FIRST AGENT WHILE HONOR GUARD'S ALIEN DETECTOR WAS MALFUNCTIONING --



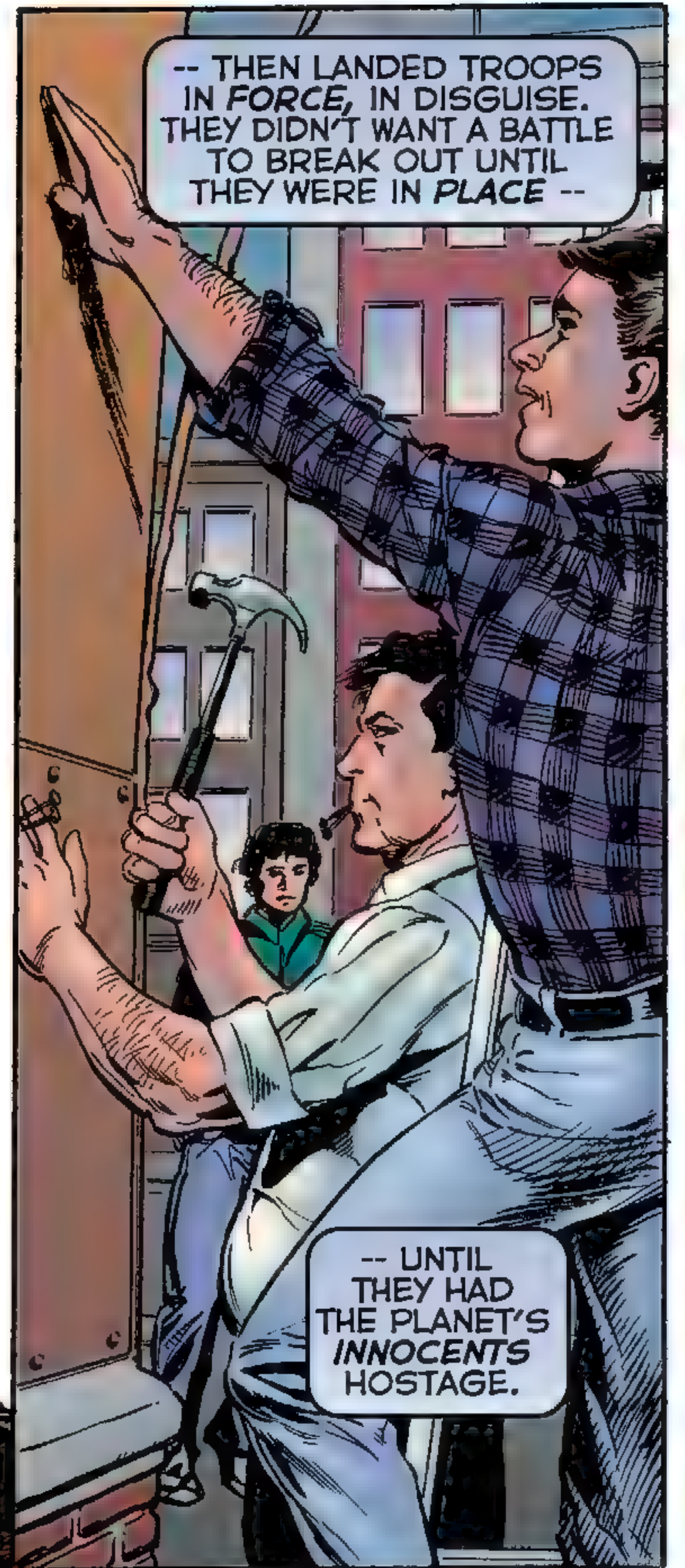
-- AND OTHERS WHILE IT WAS *BUSY*, DETECTING THE *FRIGIANS*, THE *THERMIANS*, AND OTHER THREATS.

THEY *DISCREDITED* THE HEROES RATHER THAN KILLING THEM AND RISKING *DISCOVERY* --



-- AND THEY WANTED THEM *ALIVE*, ANYWAY, TO SERVE AS *SLAVES*.

THEY HAD HONOR GUARD HEADQUARTERS CORDONED OFF TO JAM THE DETECTOR *ONCE AGAIN* --



-- THEN LANDED TROOPS IN *FORCE*, IN *DISGUISE*. THEY DIDN'T WANT A BATTLE TO BREAK OUT UNTIL THEY WERE IN *PLACE* --

-- UNTIL THEY HAD THE PLANET'S *INNOCENTS* HOSTAGE.

ONCE THEY'D FORCED A *SURRENDER*, THEY COULD ENSLAVE EARTH -- AND FACE DOWN THE GALACTIC COUNCIL.

NOW, THE AUTHORITIES WERE MAKING PLANS FOR *BACKUP* ALIEN DETECTORS --

-- AND STARWOMAN'S *CONTACT MATRIX* HAD BEEN RETURNED TO HONOR GUARD. THE SAME PLAN WOULDN'T WORK AGAIN.



BUT IT *ALMOST* WORKED. IT *COULD HAVE* WORKED.

IF NOT
FOR HIM.

THEY'D FOUND THE
VESTRY, WHILE SEARCHING
THE CONFESSOR'S MOST-
KNOWN HAUNTS. HE WASN'T
THERE TO ACTIVATE THE
COUNTERMEASURES --

-- AND I HADN'T HAD
THE HEART. SO THEY
KNEW. EVERYTHING...
AND NOTHING.

ALL THOSE
YEARS. OVER A
HUNDRED YEARS,
THEY SAY. RIGHT
IN THERE.

IT'S
CREEPY...

WELL, HE
SAVED US ALL,
DIDN'T HE? IF HE
HADN'T --

HE WAS
A VAMPIRE,
FELLA. HE WAS
JUST DOIN' WHAT
THEY DO!

AND NOW HE WAS
DEAD, AND THEY'D
NEVER KNOW WHY.

YO, BRIAN!
REGISTRATION
NEXT WEEK -- YOU
FIGURED OUT WHAT
CLASSES YOU'RE
TAKING?

I DON'T
KNOW, CHET. I
HAVEN'T REALLY
THOUGHT
ABOUT IT...

YOU
HAVEN'T
THOUGHT
ABOUT IT?
GEEZ,
GUY --

AND SLOWLY, TENTATIVELY,
THE CITY STARTED TO HEAL.
YOU COULD FEEL IT.

AND I NOTICED
SOMETHING.

THE PEOPLE WHO WERE
TALKING THESE DAYS --
THE PEOPLE *PRAISING*
THE HEROES, SHOWING
FAITH IN THEM --

-- I DIDN'T THINK
THEY WERE THE SAME
PEOPLE AS *BEFORE*,
WHO WERE SHOUTING
FOR THE HEROES'
HEADS.

AND I
REMEMBERED
SOMETHING THE
CONFESSOR
SAID --

BOTH
FACES ARE
ALWAYS THERE.
THE DARKER
ONE STAYS
SHADOWED,
MOST OF THE
TIME...

...BUT
IT'S COME
OUT INTO THE
LIGHT OVER
LESS THAN
THIS...!


AND I HAD A LOT TO
THINK ABOUT -- ABOUT
MOBS, AND HOW MUCH
THEY SPEAK FOR
EVERYONE --

-- AND ABOUT
MY DAD, AND THE
WAY HE VALUED
SICK KIDS OVER
DEADBEAT
PARENTS --

BUT STILL, THERE WAS
SOMETHING IN THE AIR --
SOMETHING THAT WASN'T
DONE, SOMETHING STILL
HOLDING ITS *BREATH* --

AND THEN ONE DAY,
ANOTHER *BODY* TURNED
UP, ON THE OUTSKIRTS
OF SHADOW HILL --

-- ANOTHER BODY,
MUTILATED LIKE
THE OTHERS --



AND THAT NIGHT,
THERE WAS A
GREAT LIGHT
IN THE SKY OVER
SHADOW HILL --

-- AND
WE COULD
SEE THE
**HANGED
MAN** --

-- AND
SOMETHING --
SOMETHING
ELSE --

AND IN A
SOUNDLESS
FLASH OF
LIGHT --

-- THEY
WERE
GONE --



-- AND ALL OF A SUDDEN, EVEN THE AIR SMELLED DIFFERENT. CLEANER.



IT WAS ALMOST FUNNY, IN A MACABRE SORT OF WAY. PATTERNS EVERYWHERE, AND NOBODY THOUGHT --

-- NOBODY REALIZED THAT NOT EVERYTHING FITS TOGETHER.

THE ENELSIANS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE SHADOW HILL KILLER'S EXISTENCE -- AS THEY DID WITH TROUBLE IN OTHER CITIES --

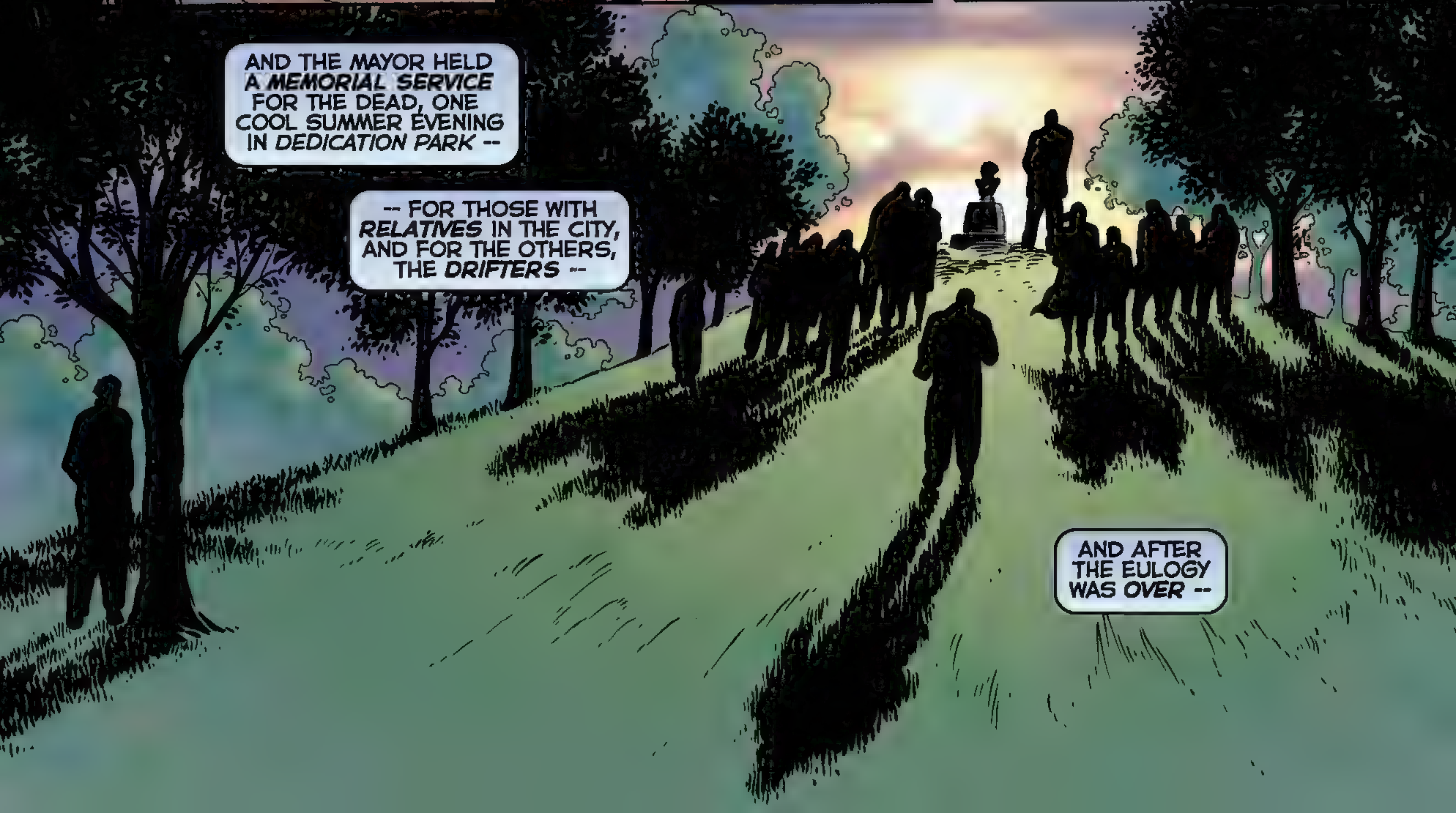


-- BUT THAT WAS ALL. THERE WAS NO CONNECTION.

FUNNY HOW LIFE WORKS, SOMETIMES.



BUT THAT WAS IT, THAT WAS THE END. THE CITY SEEMED TO EXHALE, AFTER THAT.



AND THE MAYOR HELD A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THE DEAD, ONE COOL SUMMER EVENING IN DEDICATION PARK --

-- FOR THOSE WITH RELATIVES IN THE CITY, AND FOR THE OTHERS, THE DRIFTERS --

AND AFTER THE EULOGY WAS OVER --



HE DRIFTED ALONG
THE LINE OF *RELATIVES*,
LOOKING INTO THEIR
EYES, ONE BY ONE.

AND HE DIDN'T
SAY ANYTHING --
NOT ANYTHING
ANY OF US COULD
HEAR, ANYWAY --

-- BUT YOU COULD
SEE THEM *RELAX*.
YOU COULD SEE
THAT THEY *KNEW*
SOMETHING.

THAT SOMEHOW,
HE'D LET THEM
KNOW THAT *JUSTICE*
HAD BEEN DONE.

HE HADN'T COME
FOR *THANKS*, OR FOR
PRAISE. HE'D COME
TO GIVE COMFORT.

TO
HELP.



AND IT WORKED. FOR
EVERYONE BUT ME.

I WAS STILL ALL
TANGLED UP
INSIDE. THE
CONFESSOR WAS
DEAD. SNUFFED
OUT -- JUST
LIKE THAT. AND
NOBODY CARED.



HE'D SACRIFICED HIMSELF --
KNOWINGLY AND *WILLINGLY* --
TO SAVE THE WORLD. AND
NOBODY *KNEW*.

BUT FOR ALL
I WANTED TO
SCREAM AT
EVERYONE -- TO
SHAKE THEM
UNTIL THEY
UNDERSTOOD --



-- I KNEW HE WOULDN'T HAVE
MINDED. IT WOULDN'T HAVE
BOtherED HIM. IT WAS THE
DOING THAT WAS IMPORTANT --

-- NOT PEOPLE
KNOWING WHAT
HE'D DONE.

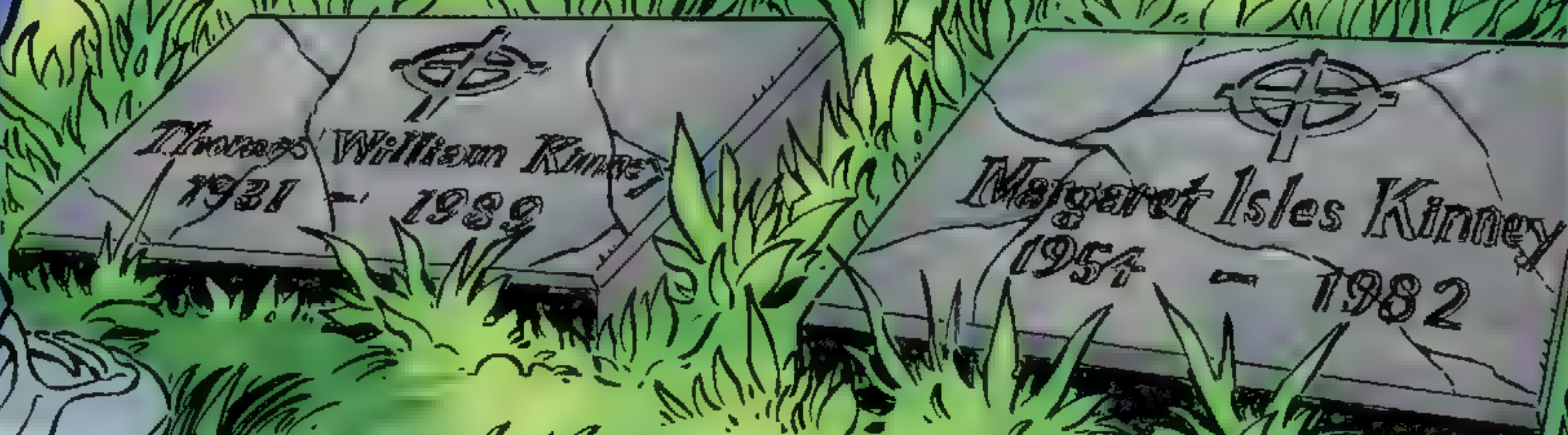


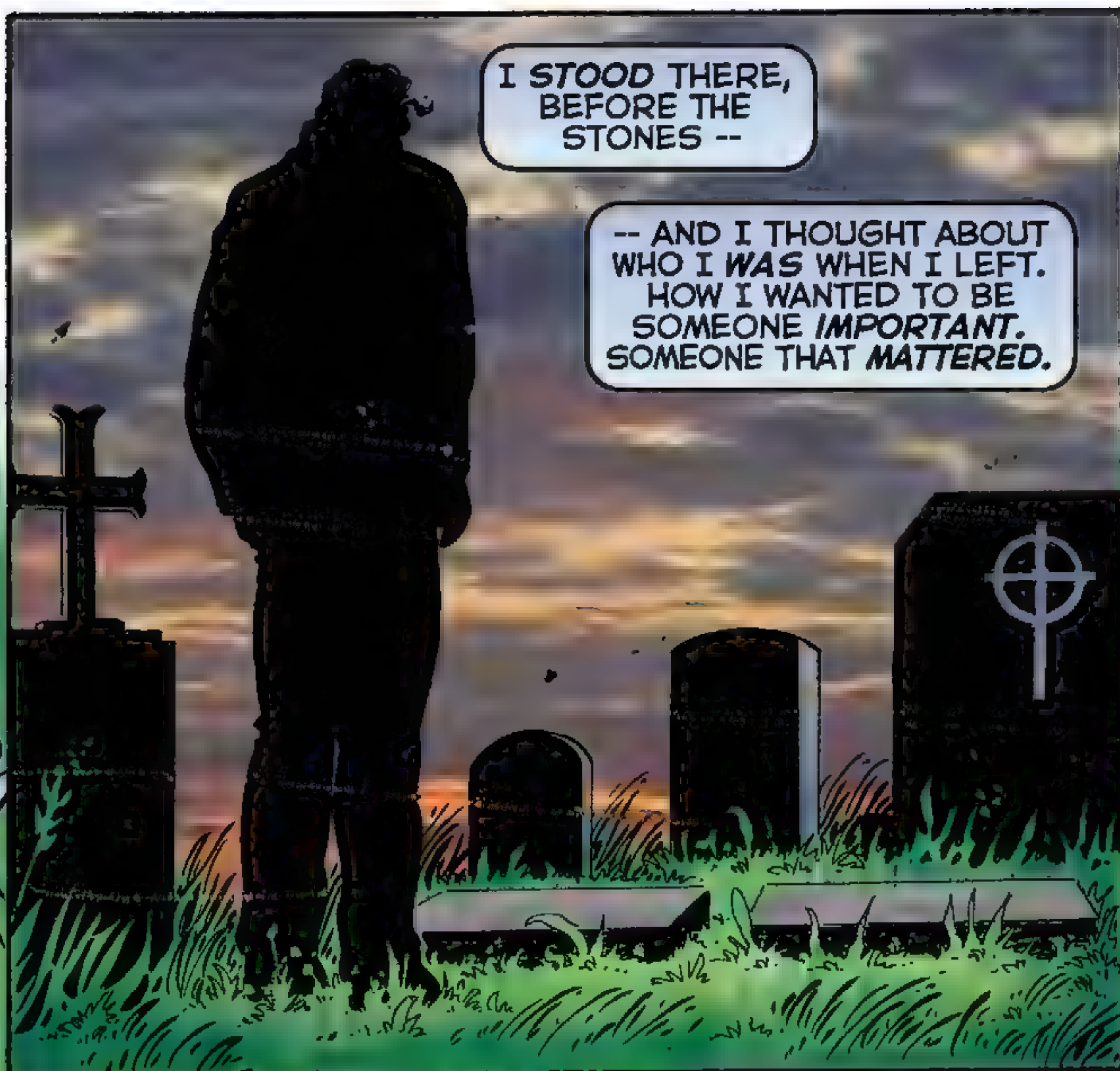
I HAD TO FIND
MY ENDING
SOMEWHERE
ELSE.

AND A FEW
DAYS LATER,
I REALIZED --

-- I REALIZED
WHERE I HAD
TO GO.

BACK TO WHERE
IT ALL *STARTED*.





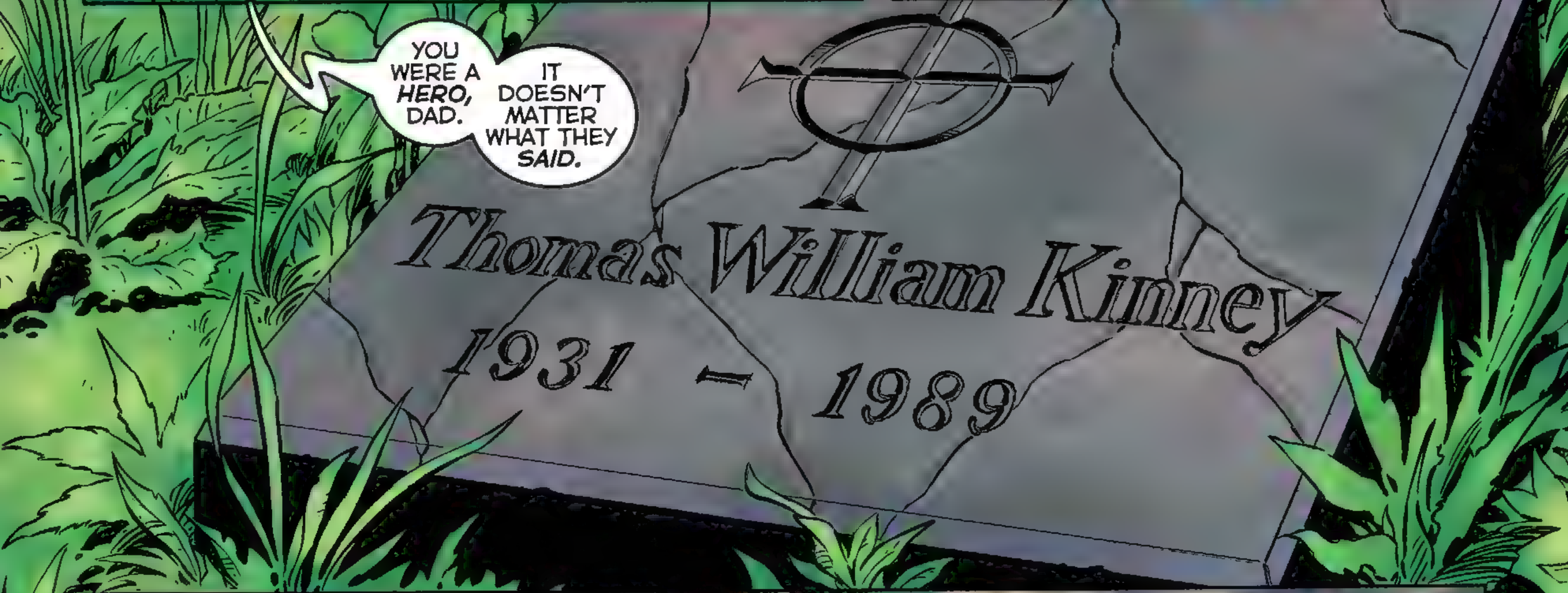
I STOOD THERE,
BEFORE THE
STONES --

-- AND I THOUGHT ABOUT
WHO I *WAS* WHEN I LEFT.
HOW I WANTED TO BE
SOMEONE *IMPORTANT*.
SOMEONE THAT *MATTERED*.



BUT YOU, DAD -- YOU
WERE *ALREADY* THAT.
IT DIDN'T MAKE ANY
DIFFERENCE WHETHER
THEY *KNEW* IT OR NOT.

YOU WERE
IMPORTANT. YOU
MATTERED.



YOU
WERE A
HERO,
DAD.

IT
DOESN'T
MATTER
WHAT THEY
SAID.

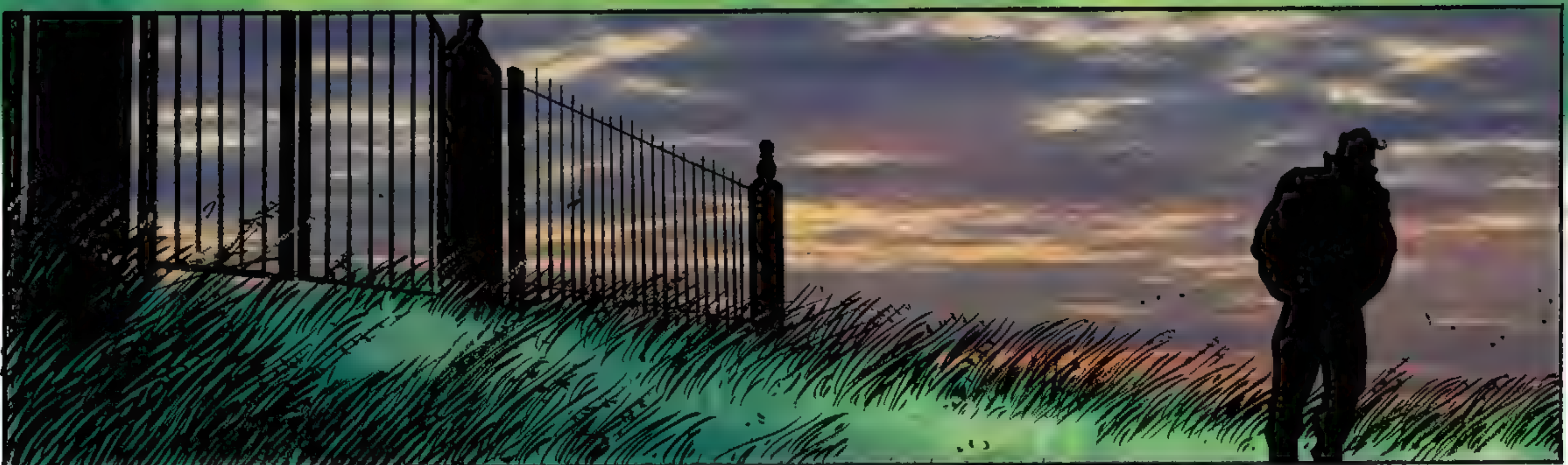
Thomas William Kinney
1931 - 1989

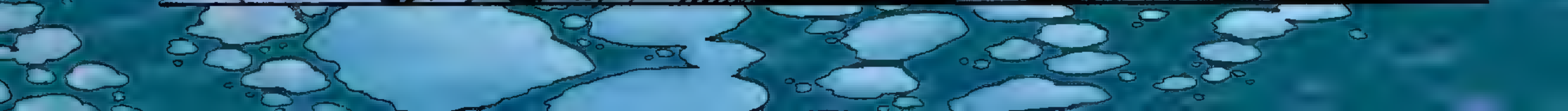
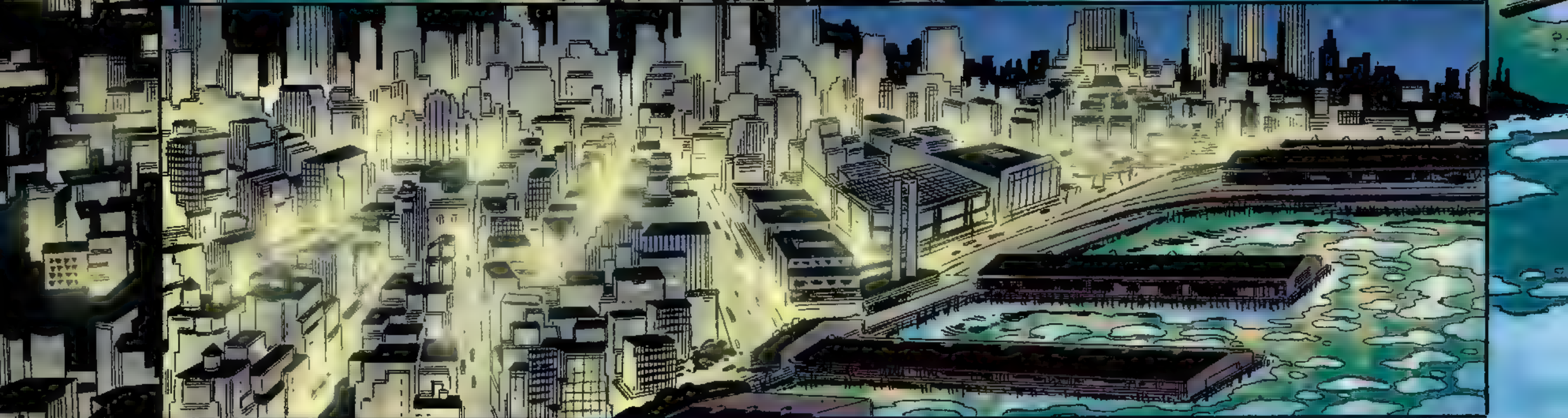


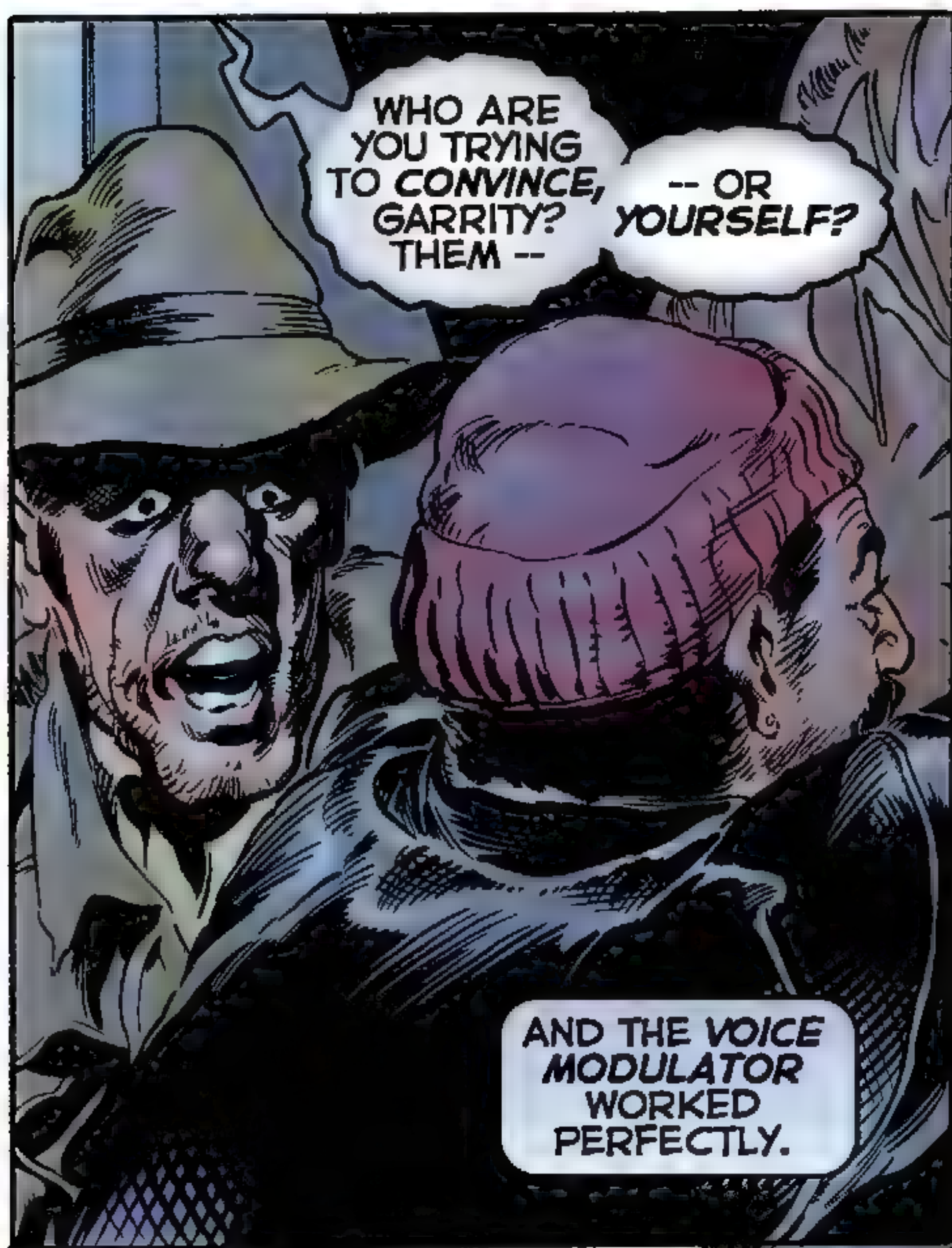
AND THAT WAS *IT*.
THAT WAS *MY* ENDING.


ALL THAT WAS LEFT WAS TO
FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO
NEXT. I HAD PLENTY OF
OPTIONS. THE CONFESSOR HAD
PREPARED, EVEN FOR THIS --

-- LEAVING ME PROVIDED
FOR, FOR MY EDUCATION,
FOR WHATEVER I MIGHT
WANT TO DO.







A comic book illustration of Batman flying over a crowd in Astro City. Batman is in the center, wearing his iconic suit and cape, with his wings spread wide. He is looking down at the crowd below. The crowd consists of several people, including an older man with white hair and a beard, a man in a yellow jacket, and a man in a red shirt. The background is a dark blue sky with stars. The overall tone is dramatic and heroic.

AND UNDER MY MASK, I COULDN'T HELP BUT SMILE.

FOR A WHILE --
FOR A LITTLE
WHILE, ANYWAY --

-- THIS WAS
GOING TO BE
EASIER THAN I'D
THOUGHT...

YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY

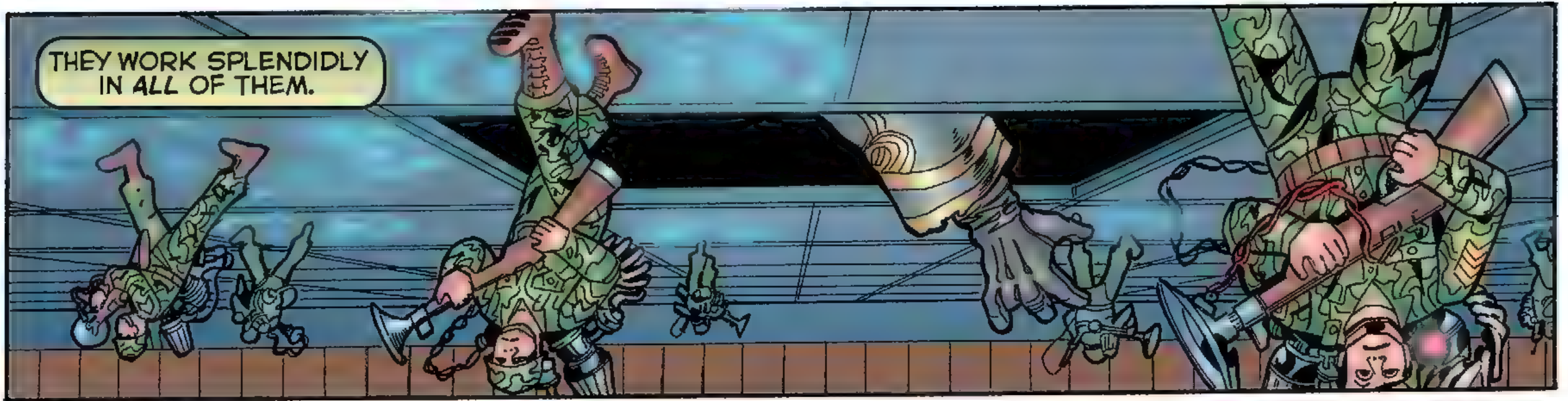




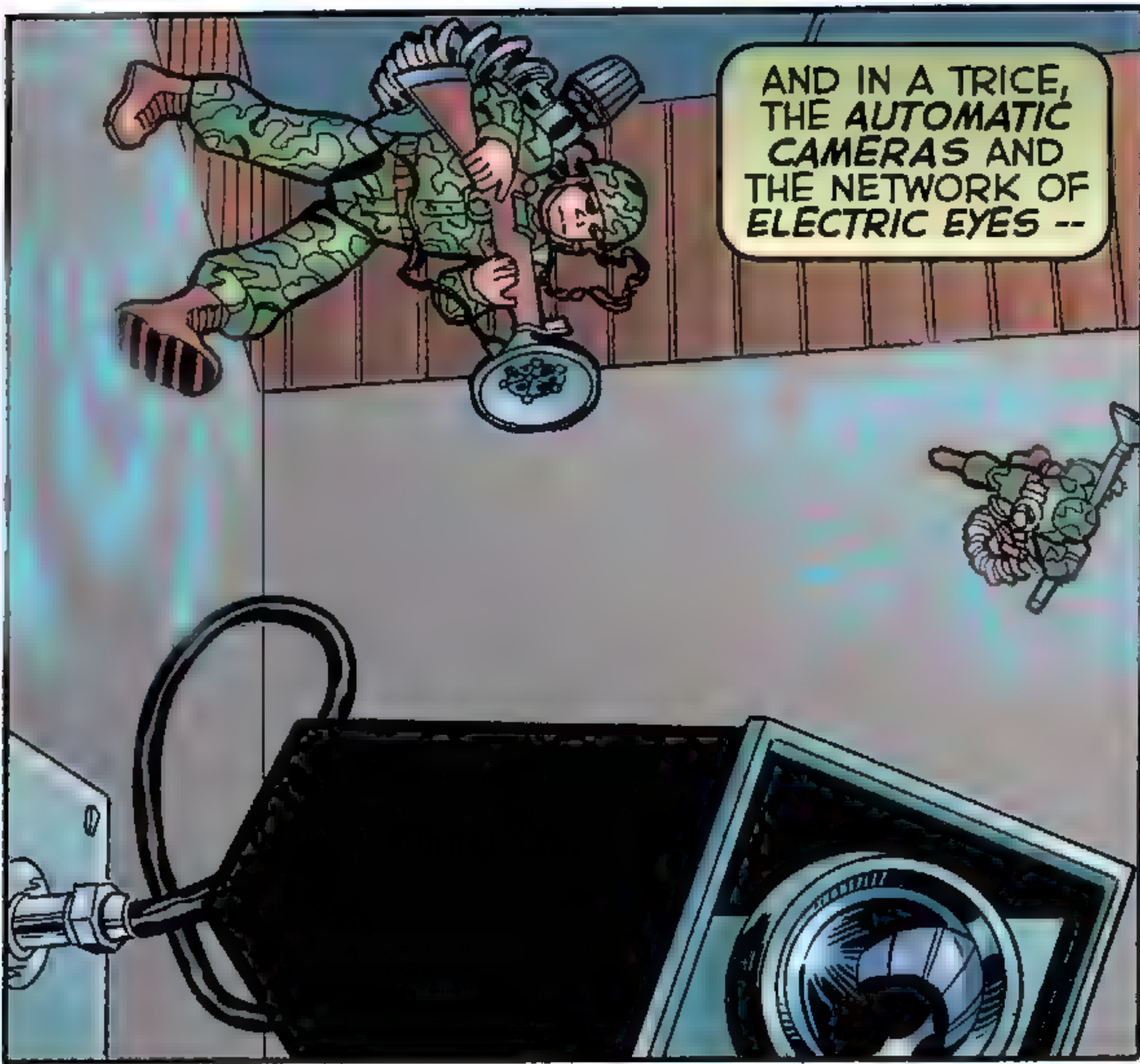
Show 'Em All



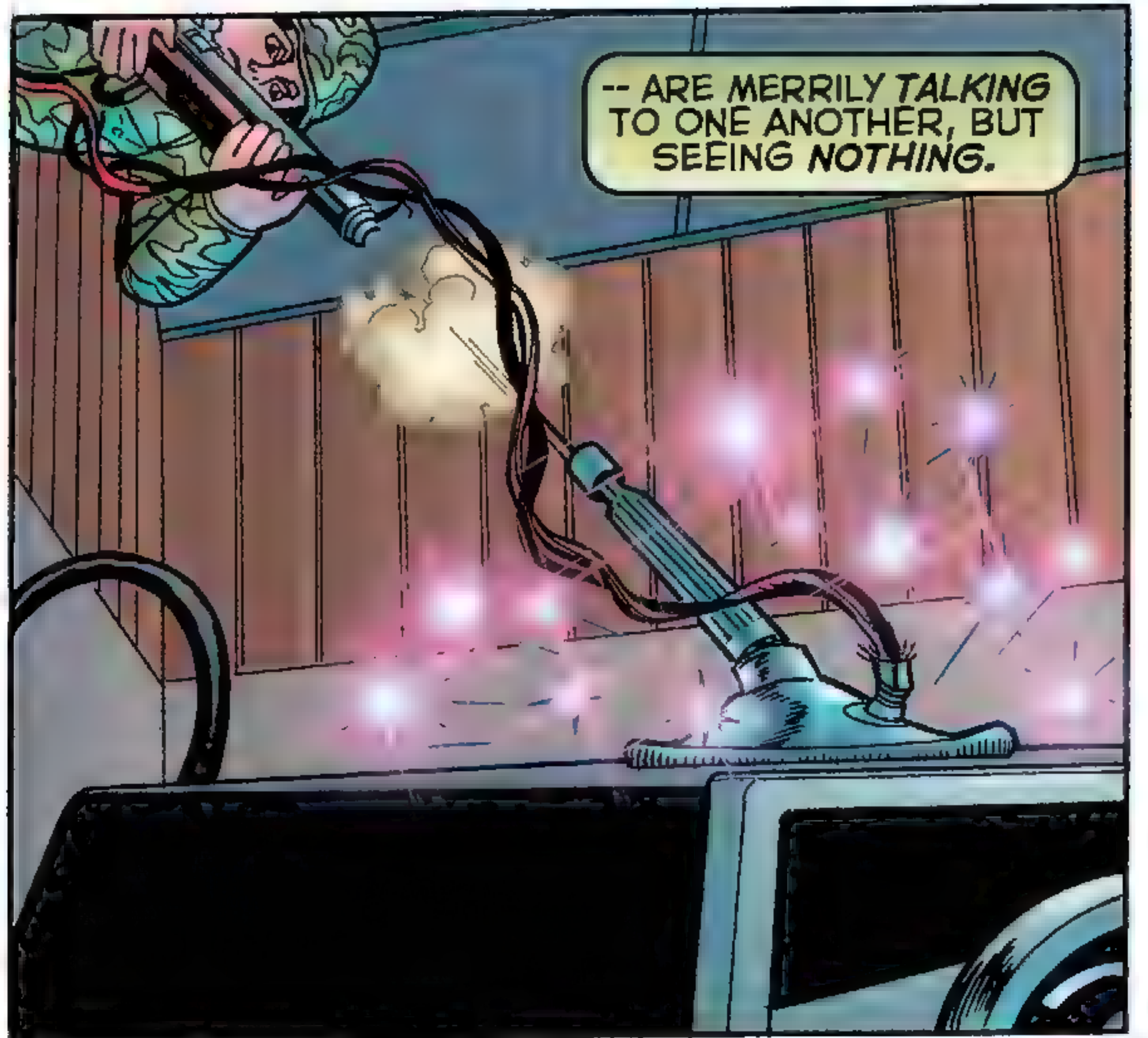
THE PSEUDO-GRAVITY
INDUCTORS IN THE
SOLDIER'S FEET
WORK SPLENDIDLY.



THEY WORK SPLENDIDLY
IN ALL OF THEM.



AND IN A TRICE,
THE AUTOMATIC
CAMERAS AND
THE NETWORK OF
ELECTRIC EYES --



-- ARE MERRILY TALKING
TO ONE ANOTHER, BUT
SEEING NOTHING.



THEY ADDED THE ELECTRIC
EYES AFTER THE *TECHSPERTS*
BROKE IN, TWO YEARS AGO, AND
WERE CAUGHT BY *QUARREL*.

THEY PUT *PRESSURE
SENSORS* INTO THE
FLOOR, TOO. BUT THEY'RE
NO GREAT DIFFICULTY.



THE
JUNKMAN
COMES
PREPARED.

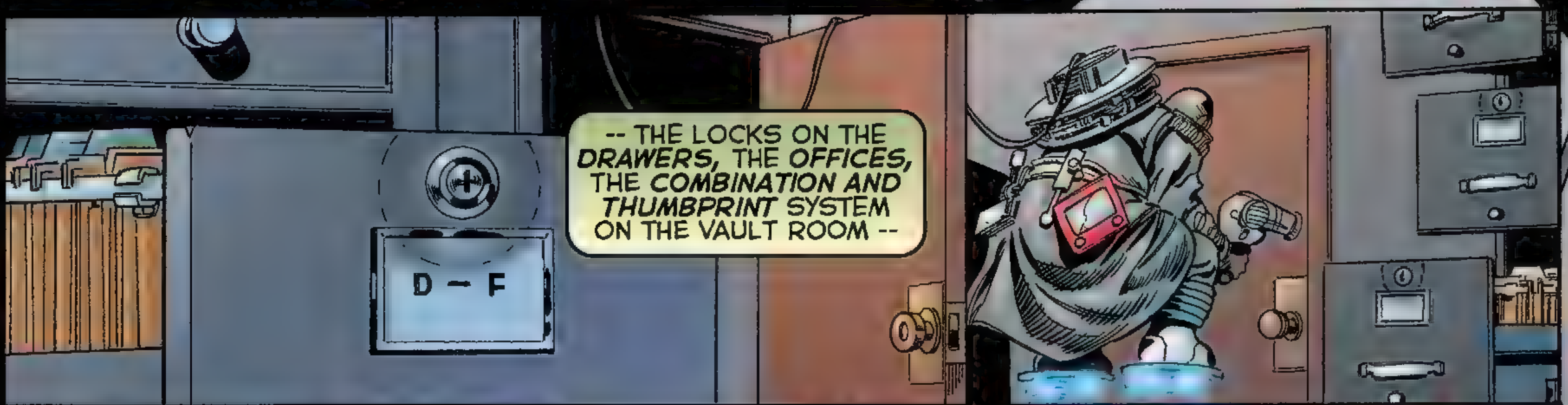
HMM

HMM

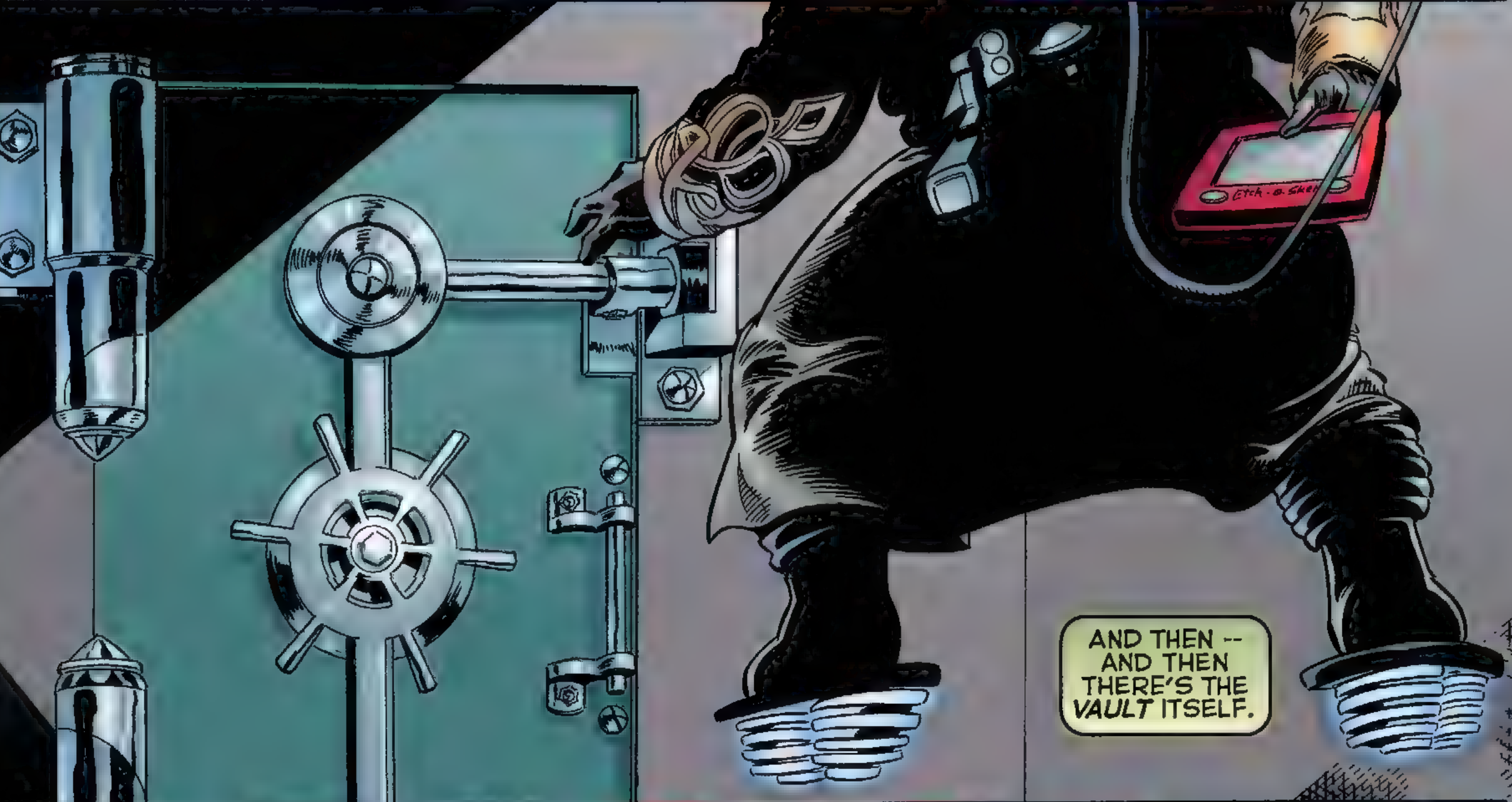
ASTRO



THE LOCKS, TOO, AREN'T AS FORMIDABLE A BARRIER AS THEY'D HOPED --

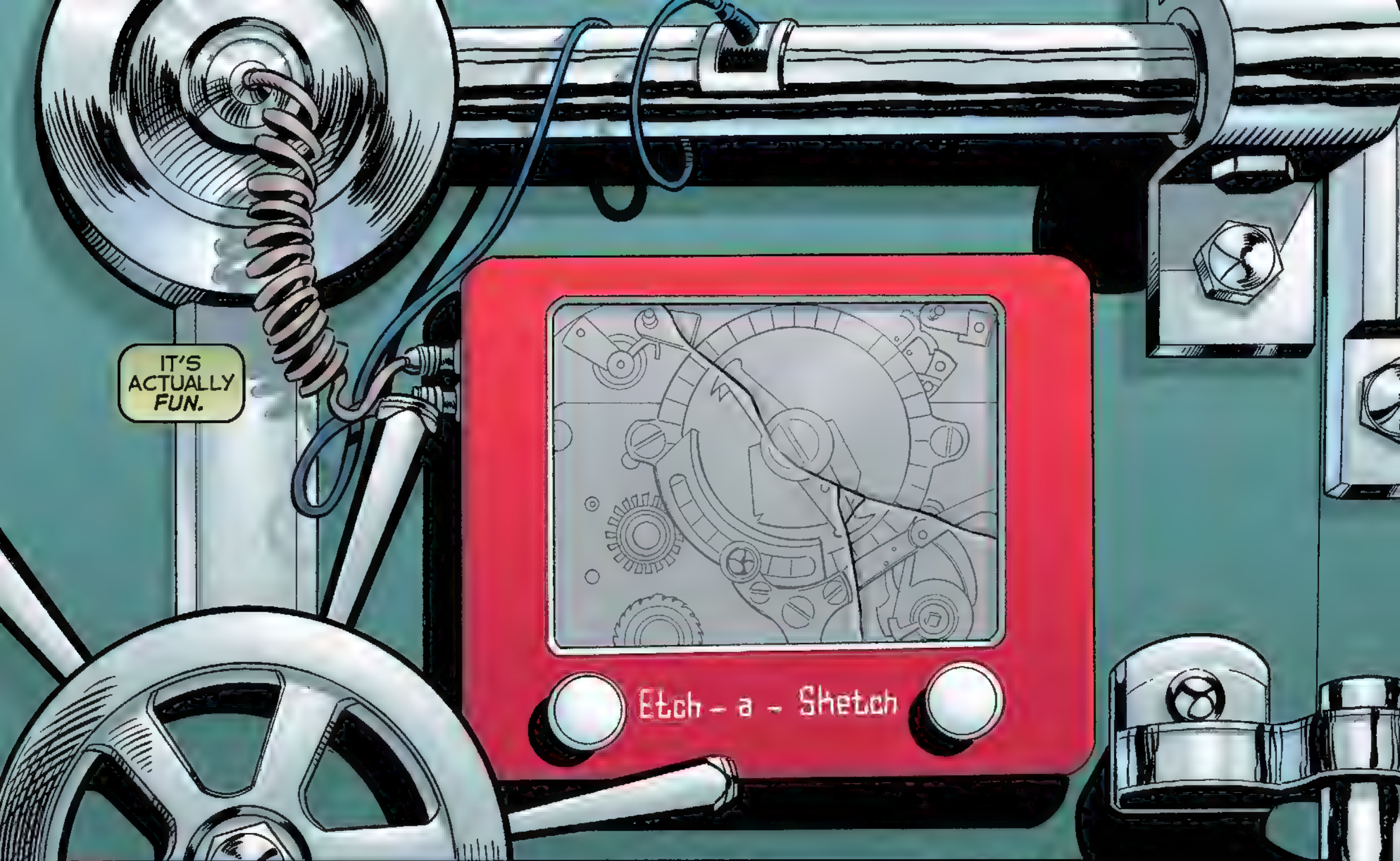


-- THE LOCKS ON THE DRAWERS, THE OFFICES, THE COMBINATION AND THUMBPRINT SYSTEM ON THE VAULT ROOM --

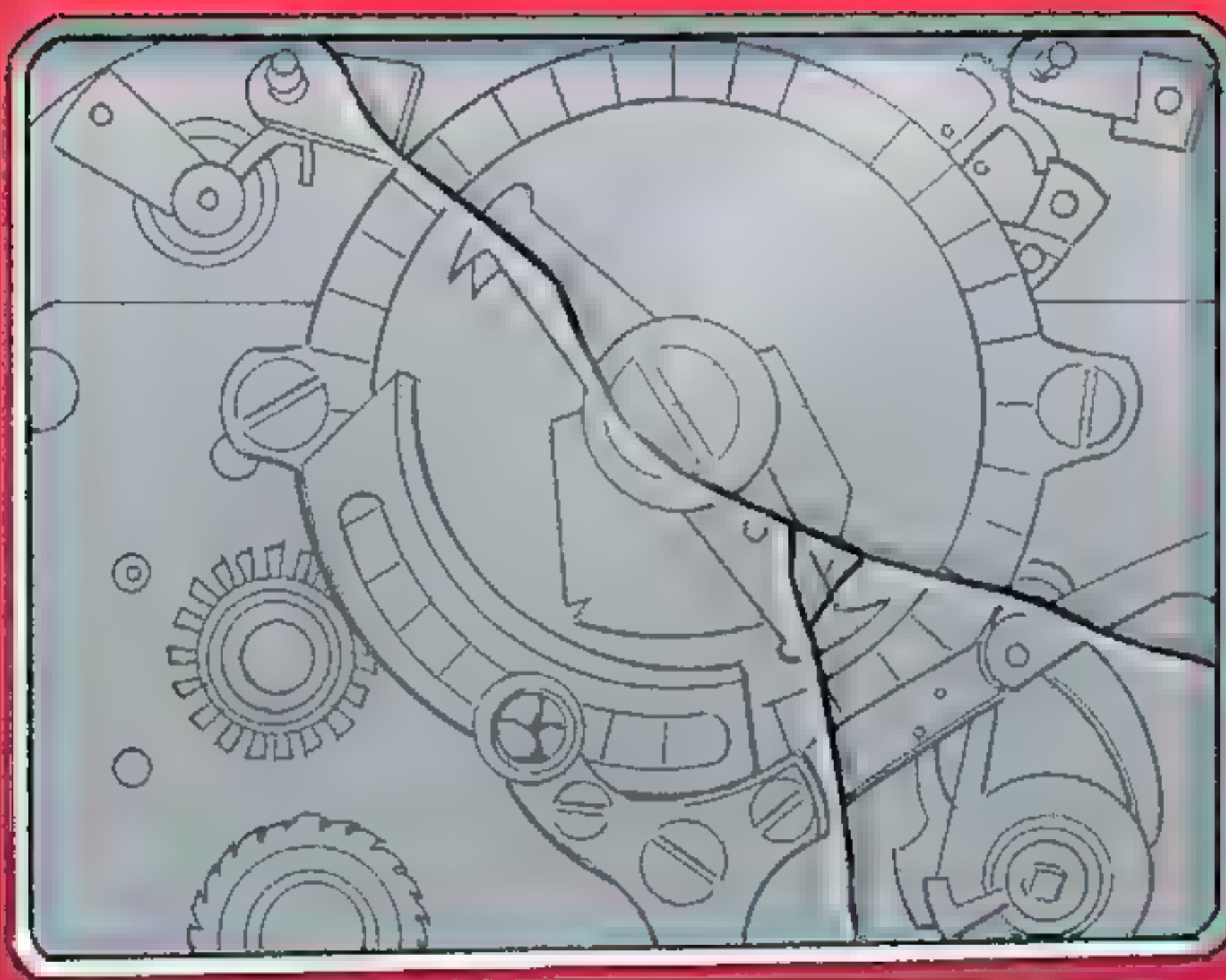


AND THEN --
AND THEN
THERE'S THE
VAULT ITSELF.





IT'S
ACTUALLY
FUN.

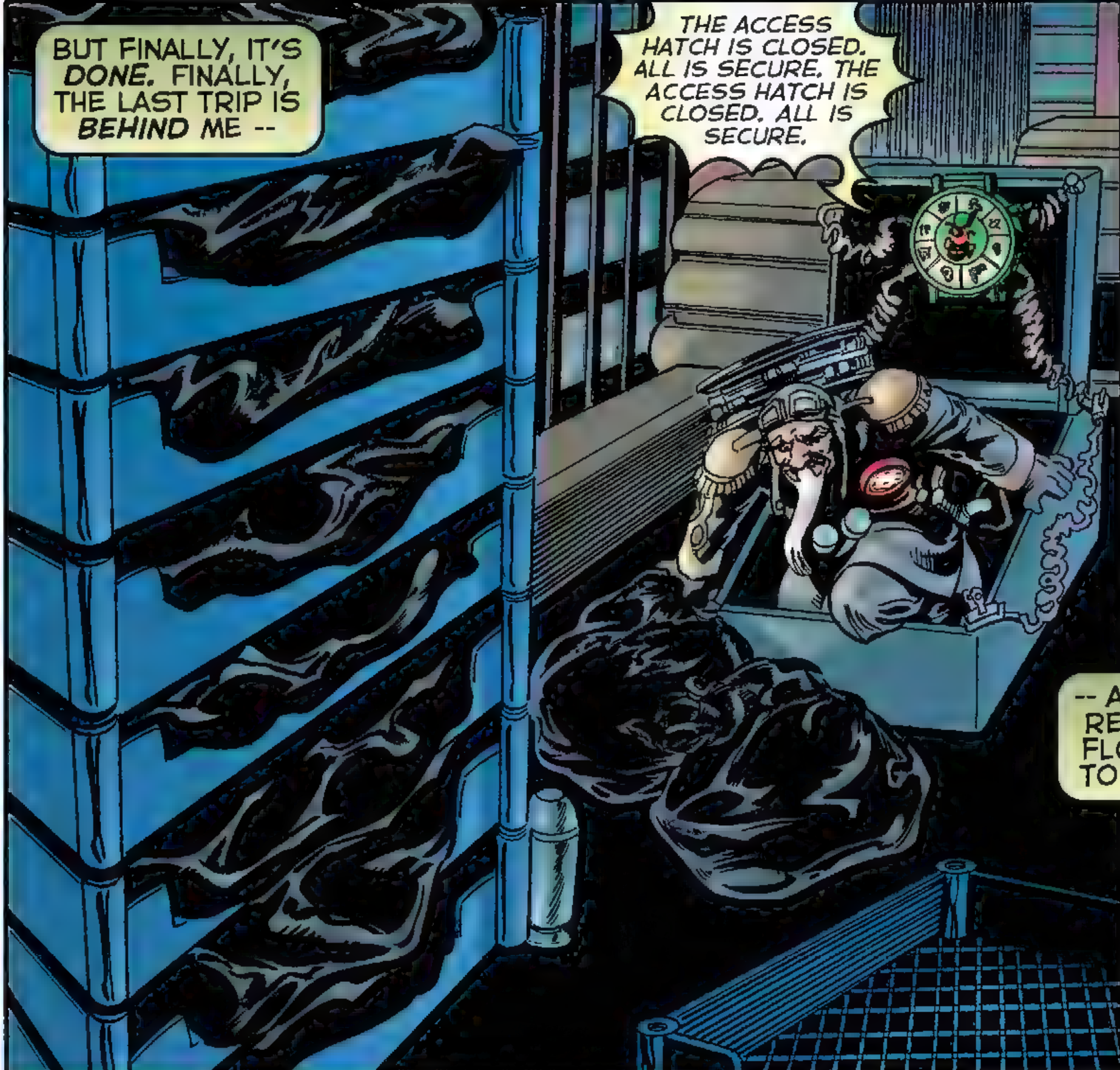


Etch - a - Sketch



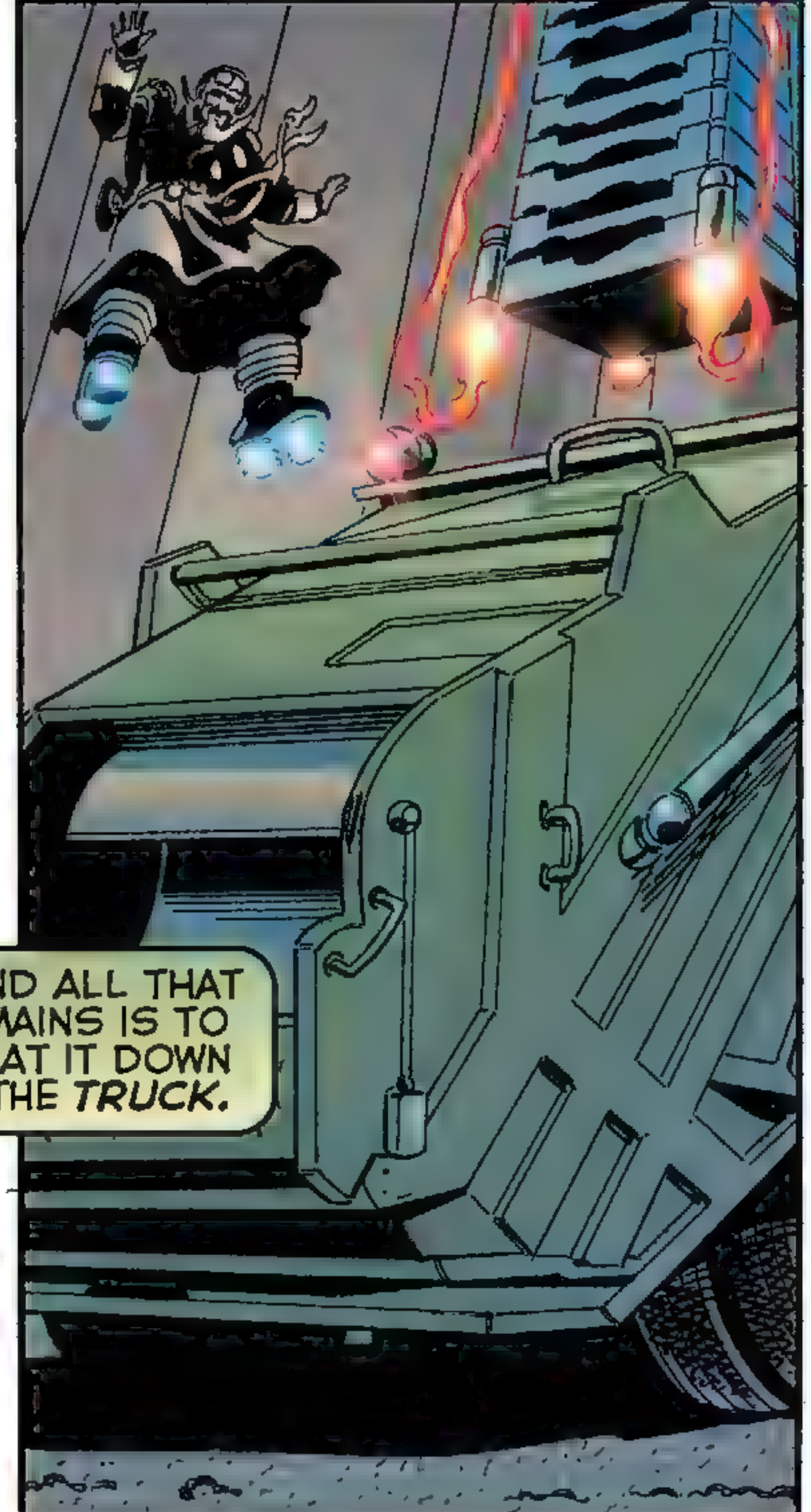
IT TAKES HOURS
TO HAUL IT ALL OUT.
ONE ELDERLY MAN,
WORKING ALONE -- OF
COURSE IT DOES.

AND MY BACK
WILL LET ME KNOW
ABOUT IT, THE
NEXT FEW DAYS.



BUT FINALLY, IT'S
DONE. FINALLY,
THE LAST TRIP IS
BEHIND ME --

THE ACCESS
HATCH IS CLOSED.
ALL IS SECURE. THE
ACCESS HATCH IS
CLOSED. ALL IS
SECURE.



-- AND ALL THAT
REMAINS IS TO
FLOAT IT DOWN
TO THE TRUCK.

JACK-IN-THE-BOX BOUNCES BY AS I'M JUST ABOUT TO LEAVE.

Rodriguez Has Satisfaction Guaranteed or Double Your Garbage Back

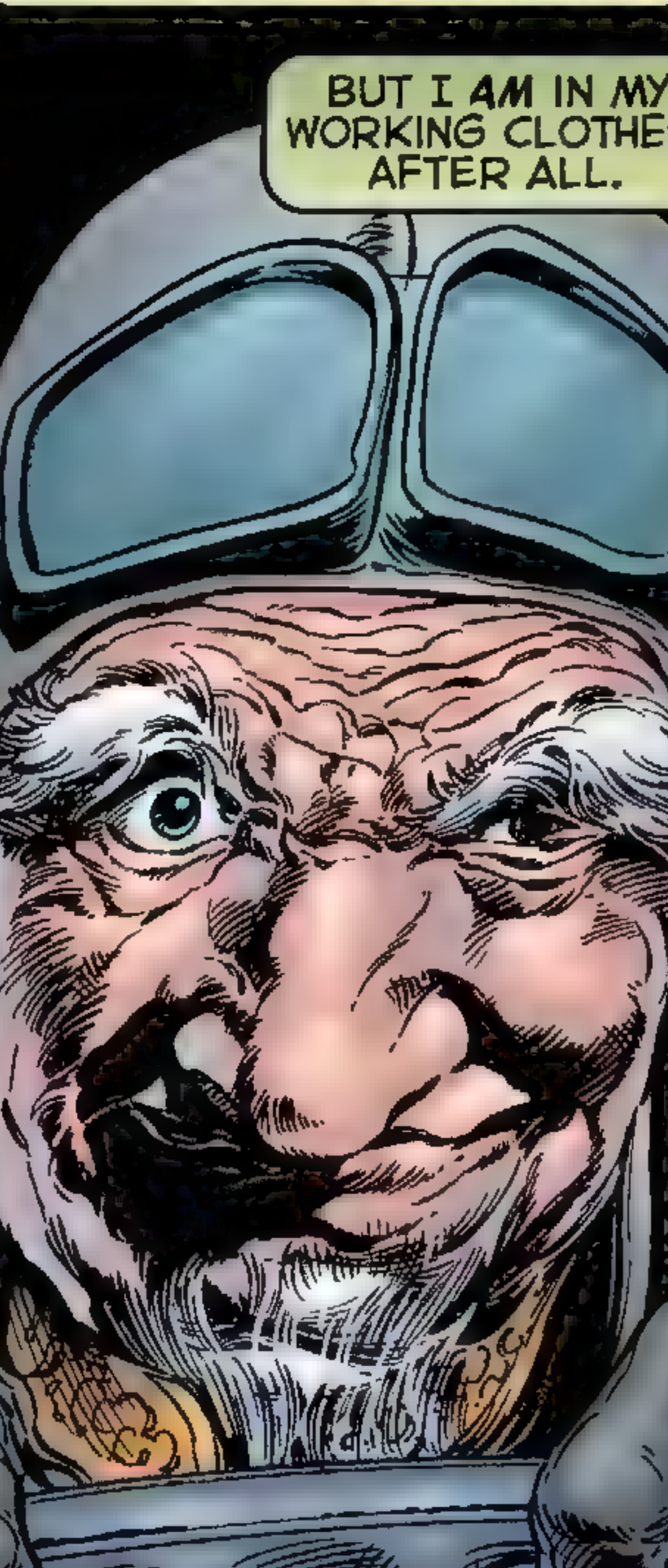
I ALMOST GIVE HIM A *CHEERY* WAVE AS I GET INTO THE TRUCK CAB. THANKS FOR KEEPING THE CITY SO *SAFE*.

BUT I AM IN MY WORKING CLOTHES, AFTER ALL.



I ALMOST GIVE HIM A *CHEERY* WAVE AS I GET INTO THE TRUCK CAB. THANKS FOR KEEPING THE CITY SO SAFE.

BUT I AM IN MY WORKING CLOTHES, AFTER ALL.



WED JUN 18 1997

ASTRO CITY ROCKET

50¢ DAILY

ASTROBANK: MYSTERY ROBBERY!

IT'S IN ALL THE PAPERS, OF COURSE.

AND IT'S ON TELEVISION.

ASTRO CITY PUBLIC DUMP & LANDFILL #3

-- ESTIMATED AT SEVEN MILLION DOLLARS. POLICE ARE BAFFLED, AND WHILE THEY SAY THE INVESTIGATION IS ONGOING --

-- THEY ADMIT THEY HAVE VERY LITTLE TO GO ON.

IT'S AMAZING HOW MANY WORDS THEY CAN SPEND SAYING, "WE DON'T KNOW" OVER AND OVER AND OVER AGAIN.

AMAZING, AND GRATIFYING.

ALL THE TIME THEY SPEND TALKING ABOUT EUROPEAN COMBINES AND TRAINED GUERRILLA OPERATIONS AND ESCAPE ROUTES --

-- AND IT'S ALL TO MASK THE SIMPLE FACT THAT THEY HAVEN'T THE FIRST CHANCE OF REALIZING --

-- THAT THE MASTERMIND BEHIND IT ALL IS RIGHT UNDER THEIR NOSES.

WHAT WAS IT -- ONLY TWENTY YEARS AGO?

I -- I GOT THIS IN MY PAY ENVELOPE. I-IS SOMETHING WRONG --

-- ARE YOU UNSATISFIED WITH MY WORK?

EDGECEO

Because Tomorrow Is Here

OF COURSE NOT, MR. POTTERSTONE. YOU'VE PERFORMED ADMIRABLY -- FOR ALL THE DECADES YOU'VE BEEN WITH US.

BUT WE HAVE A MANDATORY RETIREMENT POLICY HERE AT EDGECEO -- AND I'M AFRAID WE CAN'T MAKE EXCEPTIONS.

B-BUT -- I HAVE MORE IDEAS! NEW INVENTIONS, NEW PROCESSES -- THINGS I'VE BARELY STARTED WORKING ON!

IT WAS NO GOOD, THOUGH. I REMEMBERED WHEN EDGECEO WAS STILL EDGEFIELD AND WICKERSHAM OFFICE SUPPLIES & REPAIR --

-- AND THAT WAS APPARENTLY DANGEROUS KNOWLEDGE. SO THEY GAVE ME A GOLD WATCH --

-- AND A GENTLE BUT UNYIELDING SHOVE OUT THE DOOR.

THEY WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES, EITHER. EVERYONE SAW THE WRINKLES ON MY BROW INSTEAD OF THE BRAIN BEHIND IT --

I'M SORRY, MR. POTTERSTONE. YOUR RESUME IS WONDERFUL, AND IF YOU WERE ONLY IN YOUR FORTIES --

-- YOUR FIFTIES, EVEN --

IS THAT IT, THEN? IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT I CAN DO -- WHAT I CAN THINK OF, WHAT I CAN CREATE --

-- I'M JUST SUDDENLY OBSOLETE? OH, LOOK AT THE CALENDAR --

-- TIME TO THROW OUT ALL THE OLD MEN, LIKE SO MUCH JUNK!

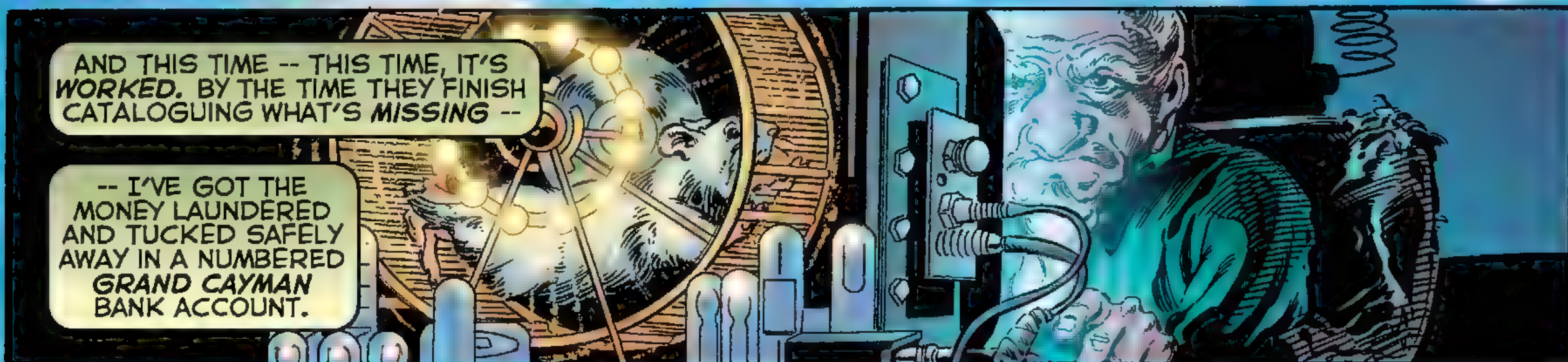
THEY'RE FOOLS, ALL OF THEM! THEY DON'T REALIZE WHAT THEY HAD -- WHAT THEY'VE THROWN AWAY!

BUT I'LL SHOW THEM! HIRAM POTTERSTONE WILL SHOW THEM ALL!



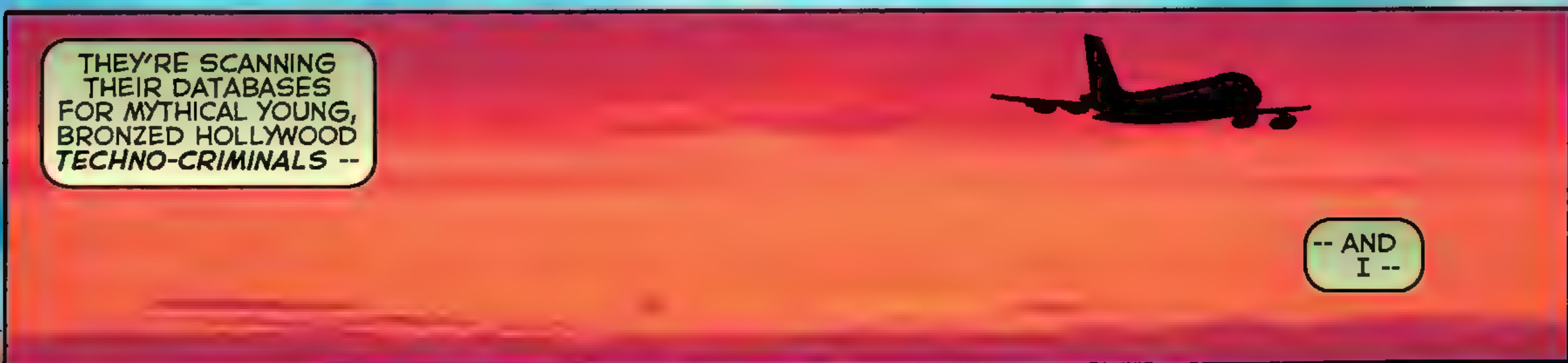
THE SUPERHEROES STOPPED ME, OF COURSE. PRIMARILY JACK-IN-THE-BOX -- HE STYMIED ME AT EVERY TURN.

BUT HE AND THE OTHERS WERE JUST HURDLES TO BE OVERCOME. I HAD TIME -- TIME AND MY BRAIN -- AND THAT'S ALL I NEEDED.



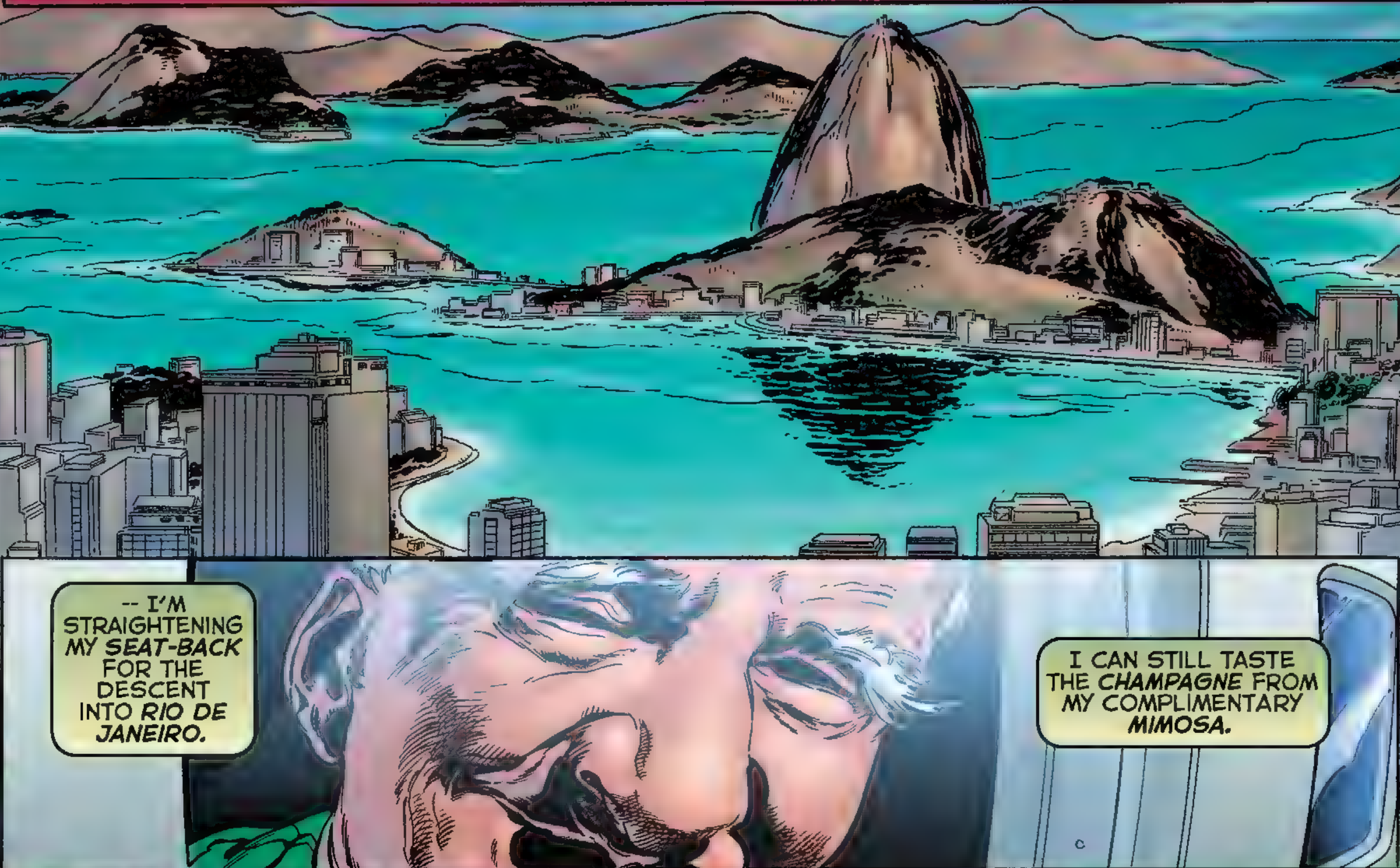
AND THIS TIME -- THIS TIME, IT'S WORKED. BY THE TIME THEY FINISH CATALOGUING WHAT'S MISSING --

-- I'VE GOT THE MONEY LAUNDERED AND TUCKED SAFELY AWAY IN A NUMBERED GRAND CAYMAN BANK ACCOUNT.



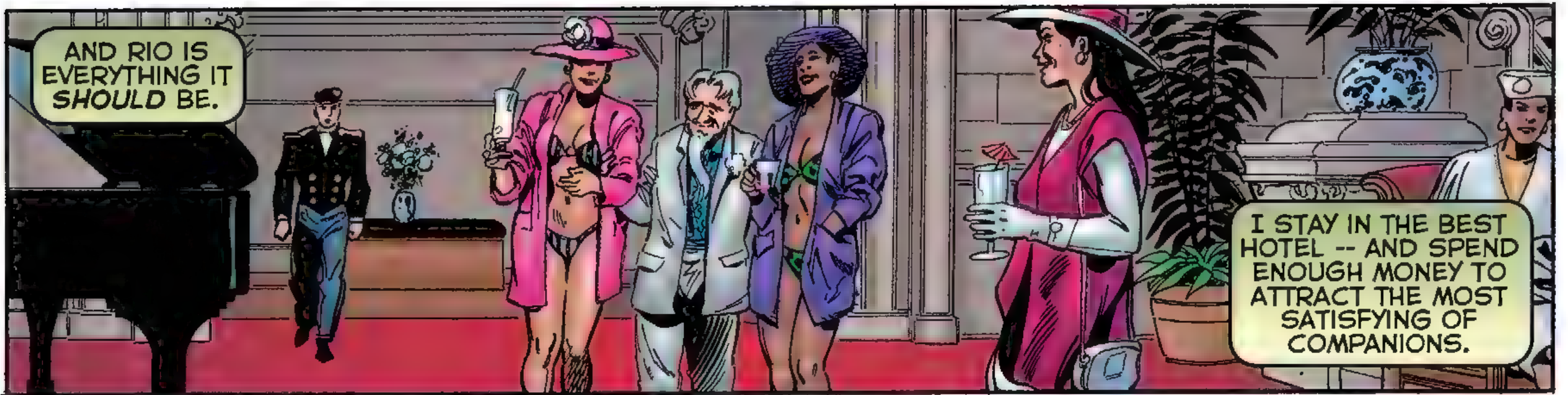
THEY'RE SCANNING THEIR DATABASES FOR MYTHICAL YOUNG, BRONZED HOLLYWOOD TECHNO-CRIMINALS --

-- AND I --



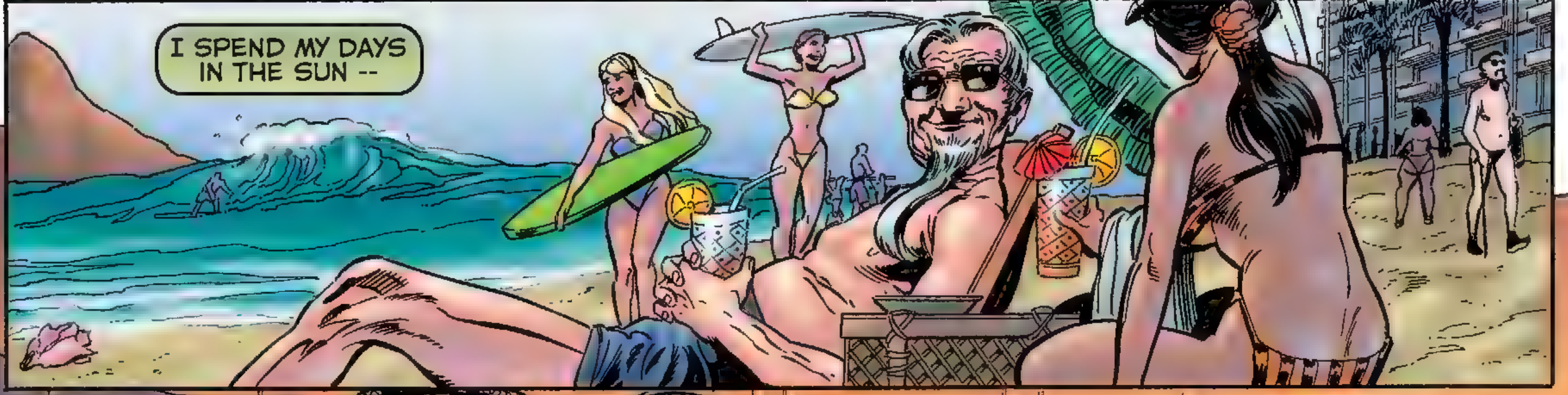
-- I'M STRAIGHTENING MY SEAT-BACK FOR THE DESCENT INTO RIO DE JANEIRO.

I CAN STILL TASTE THE CHAMPAGNE FROM MY COMPLIMENTARY MIMOSA.

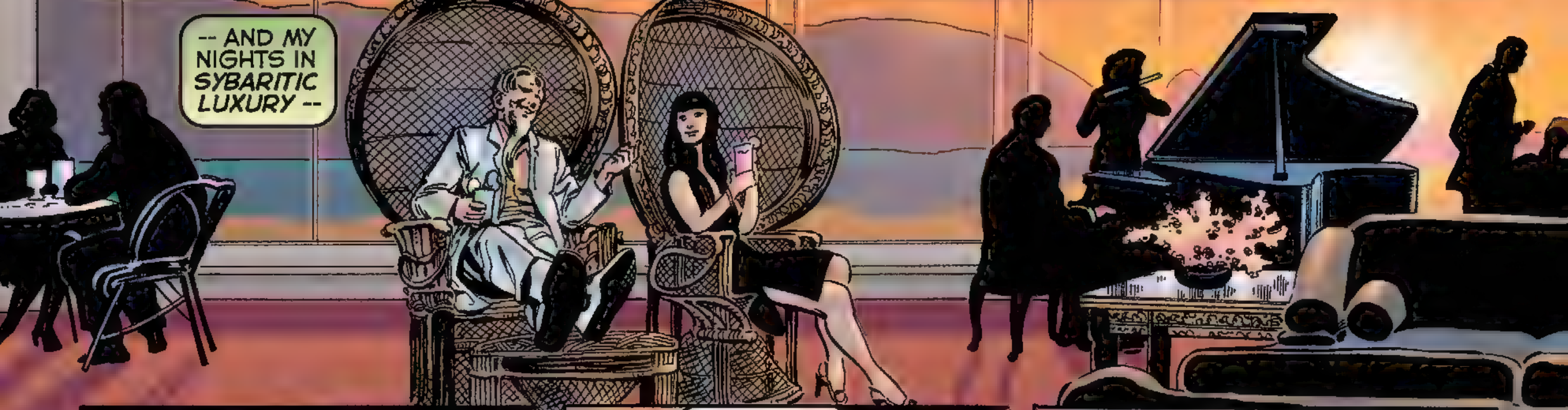


AND RIO IS EVERYTHING IT SHOULD BE.

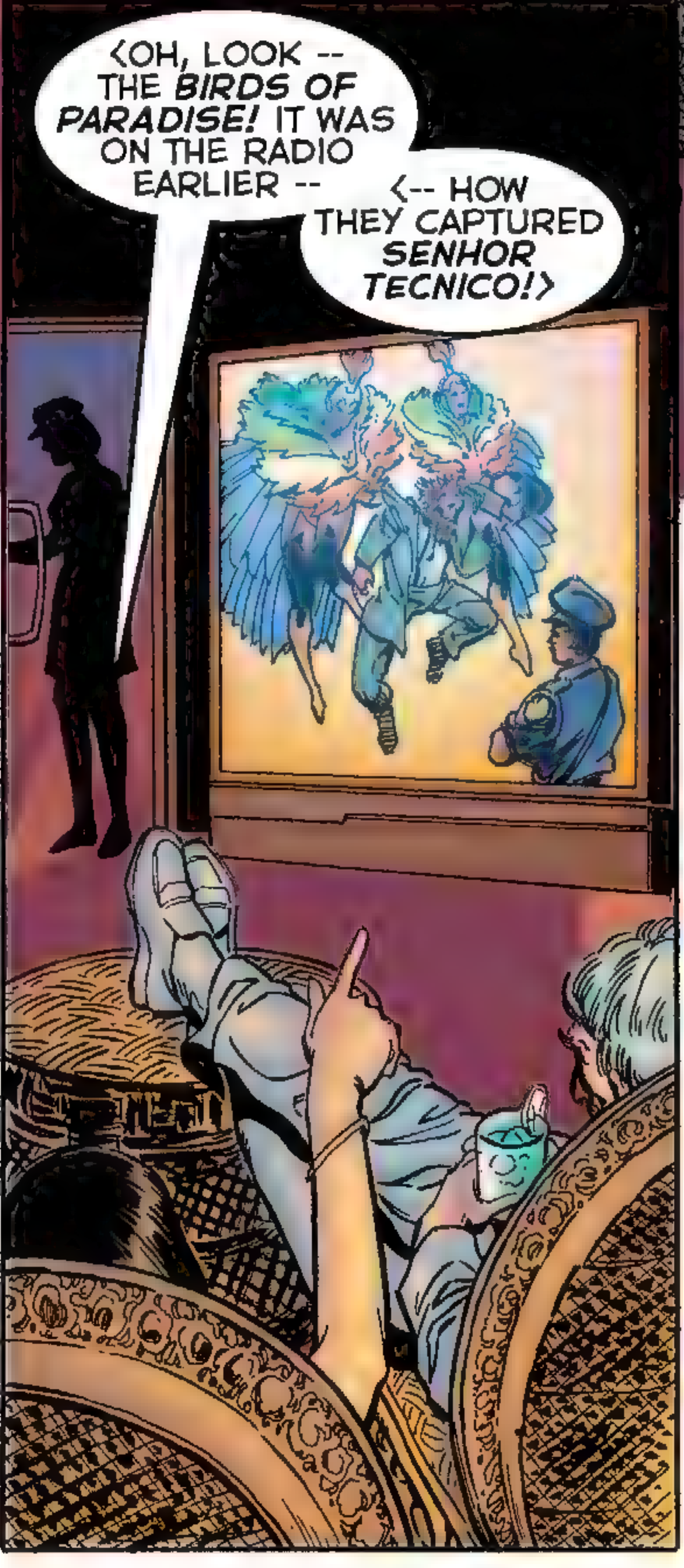
I STAY IN THE BEST HOTEL -- AND SPEND ENOUGH MONEY TO ATTRACT THE MOST SATISFYING OF COMPANIONS.



I SPEND MY DAYS IN THE SUN --

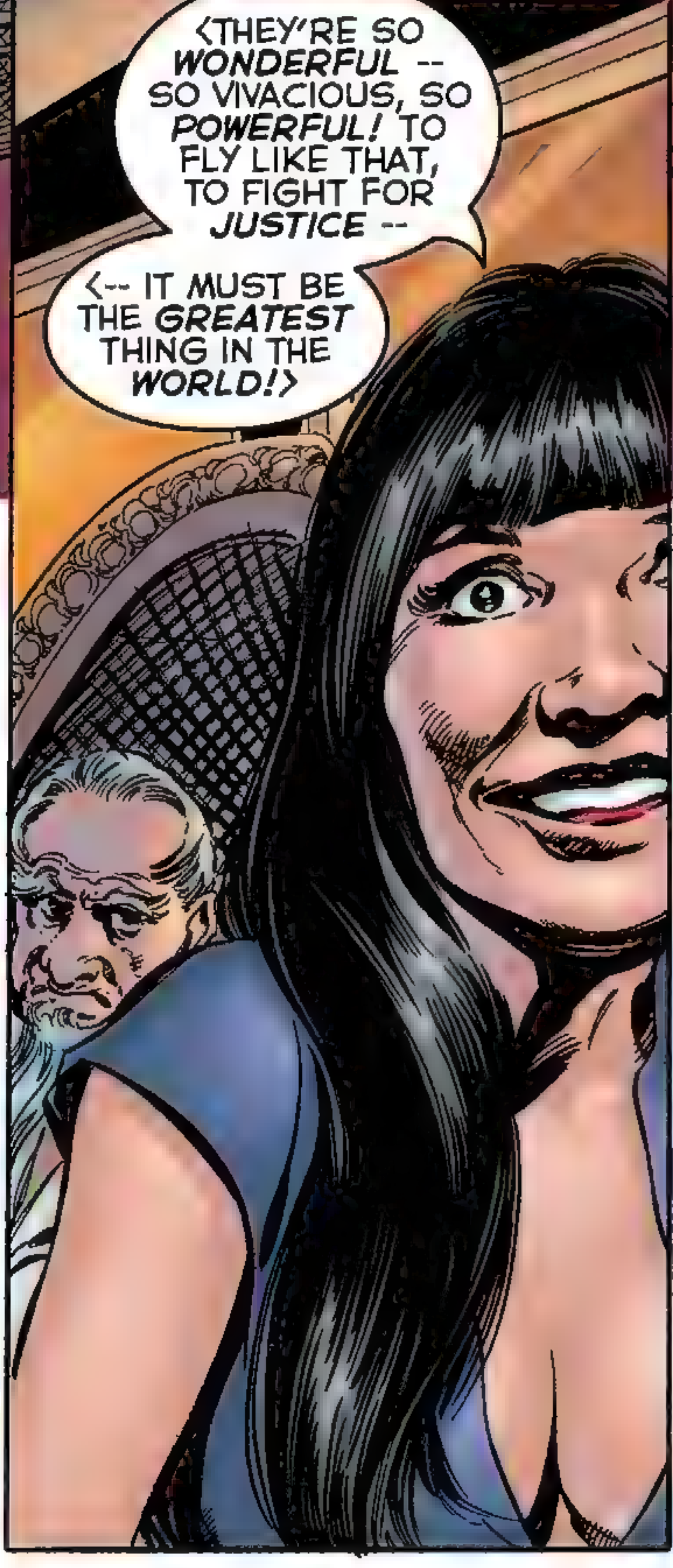


-- AND MY NIGHTS IN SYBARITIC LUXURY --



<OH, LOOK -- THE BIRDS OF PARADISE! IT WAS ON THE RADIO EARLIER --

<-- HOW THEY CAPTURED SENHOR TECNICO!>



<THEY'RE SO WONDERFUL -- SO VIVACIOUS, SO POWERFUL! TO FLY LIKE THAT, TO FIGHT FOR JUSTICE --

<-- IT MUST BE THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD!>



<OH, THEY'RE NOT SO SPECIAL...>



<THEY DON'T WIN ALL THE TIME, YOU KNOW. SUPERHEROES MAKE MISTAKES, THEY FAIL -- JUST LIKE ANYONE ELSE.>



<OH, NOW THAT'S JUST NOT SO. IT WAS ONLY LAST MONTH, THE BIRDS HELPED DRIVE OFF THOSE ALIENS, EH?>

<THEY MAY LOSE A SKIRMISH HERE AND THERE, BUT IN THE END, THE SUPERIOS GET WHO THEY'RE AFTER...>



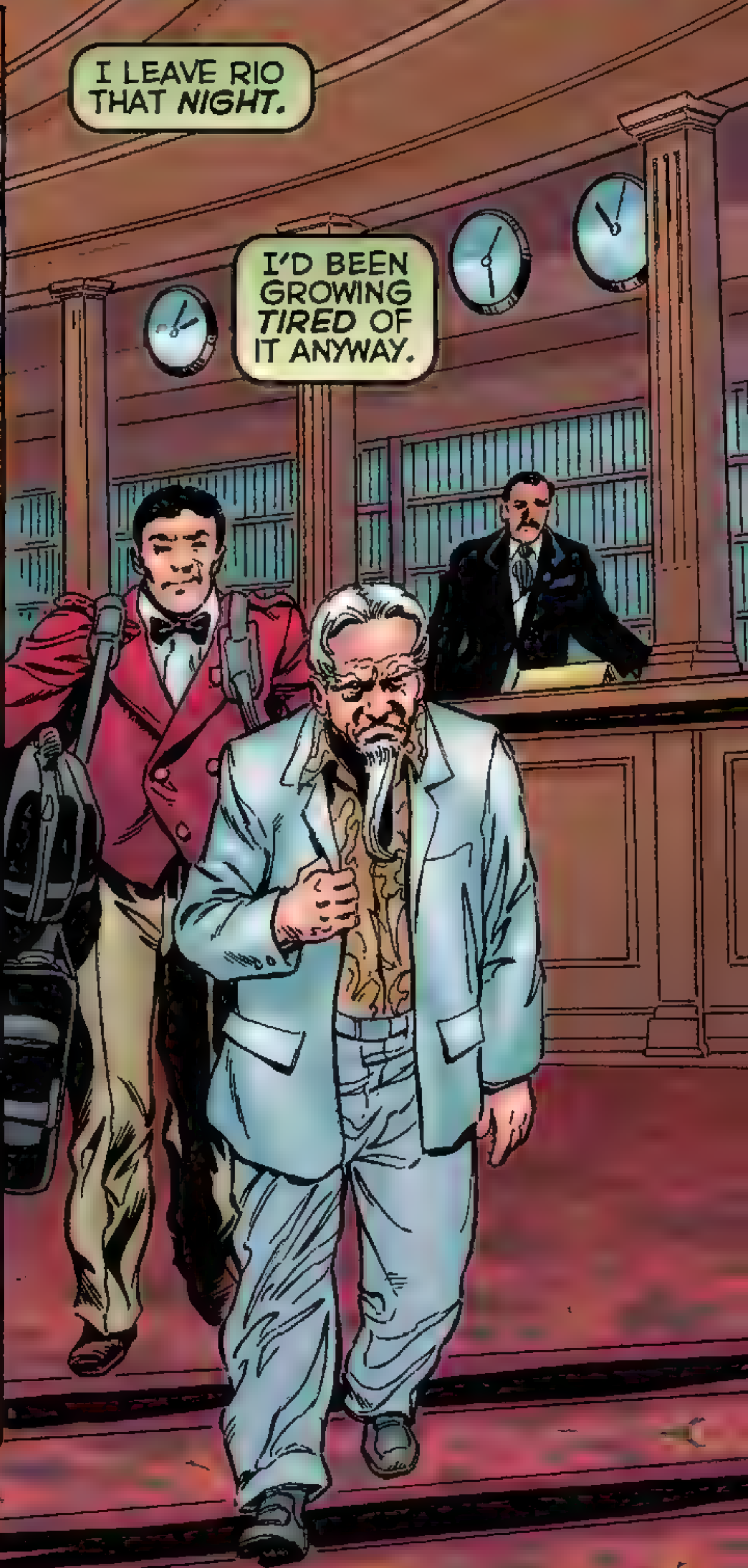
<NOT ALWAYS, MY FRIEND. YOU REMEMBER THAT BANK IN ASTRO CITY, A FEW MONTHS AGO? THE MAN WHO DID THAT -->

<-- HE GOT AWAY CLEAN, UNDER THE NOSES OF THE HIGHEST CONCENTRATION OF SUPERHEROES ON EARTH.>



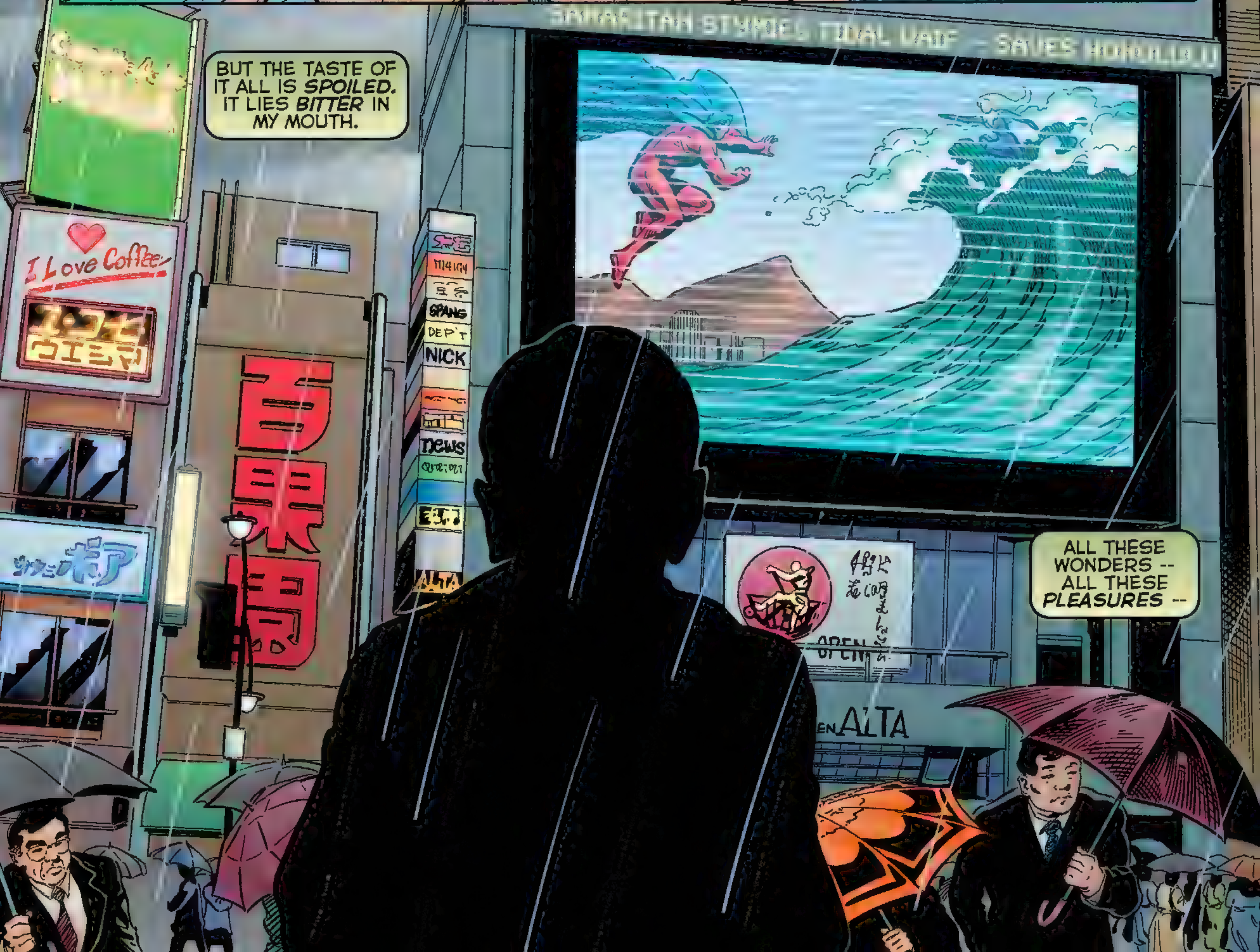
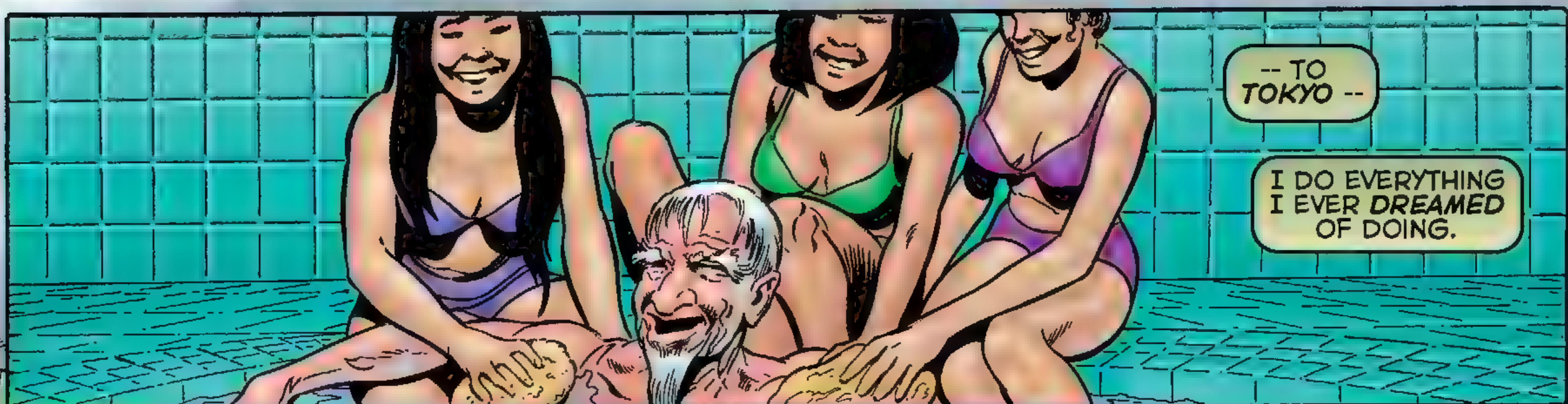
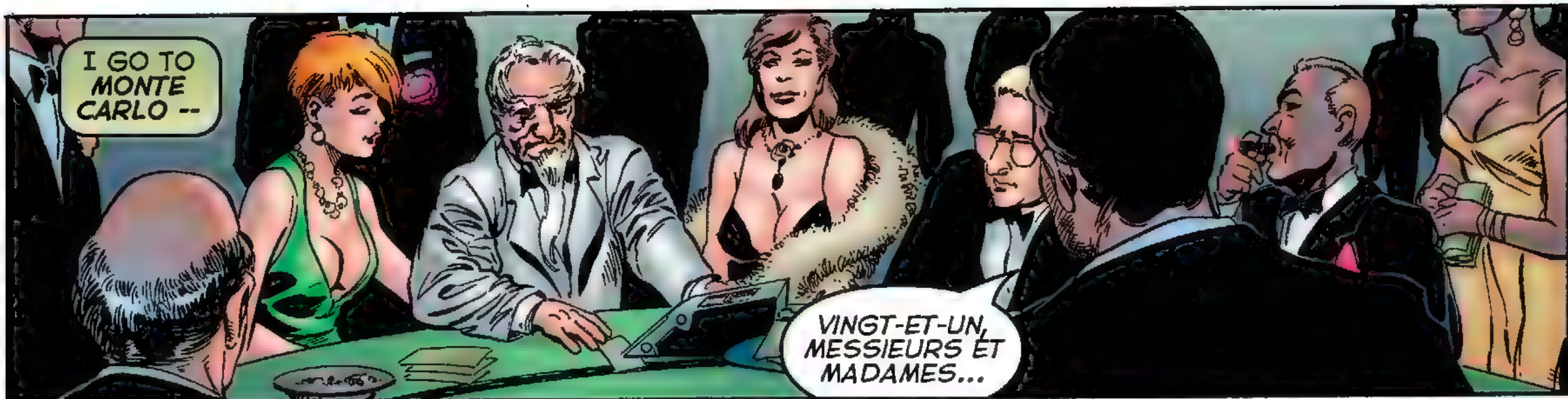
<IT ONLY LOOKS THAT WAY, I'M SURE. THEY CAUGHT HIM -- SOMEWHERE ELSE, PERHAPS, OR FOR SOME OTHER CRIME.>

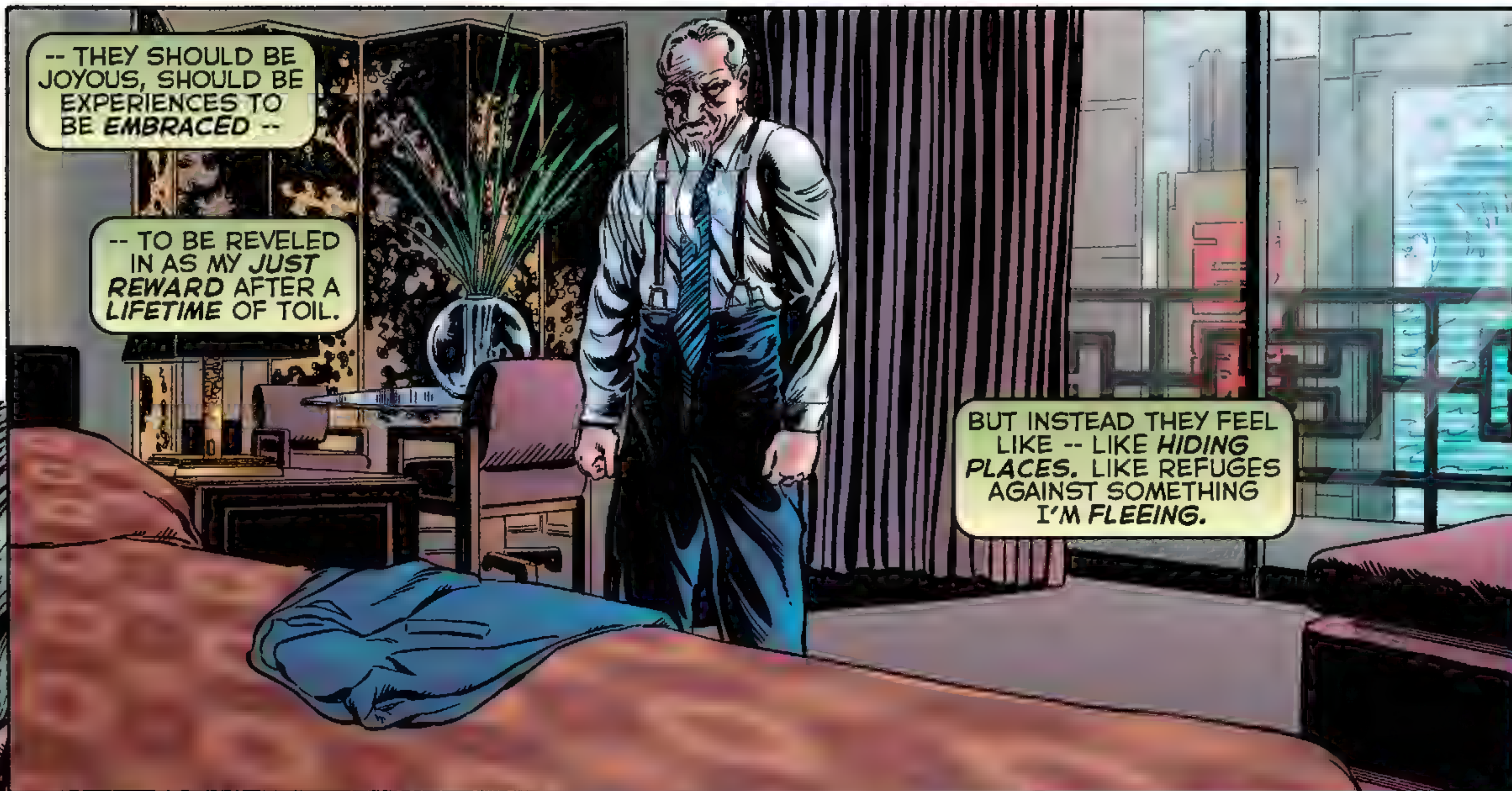
<LISTEN TO HER, SENHOR -- SHE KNOWS. THE SUPERIOS DO NOT FAIL.>



I LEAVE RIO THAT NIGHT.

I'D BEEN GROWING TIRED OF IT ANYWAY.





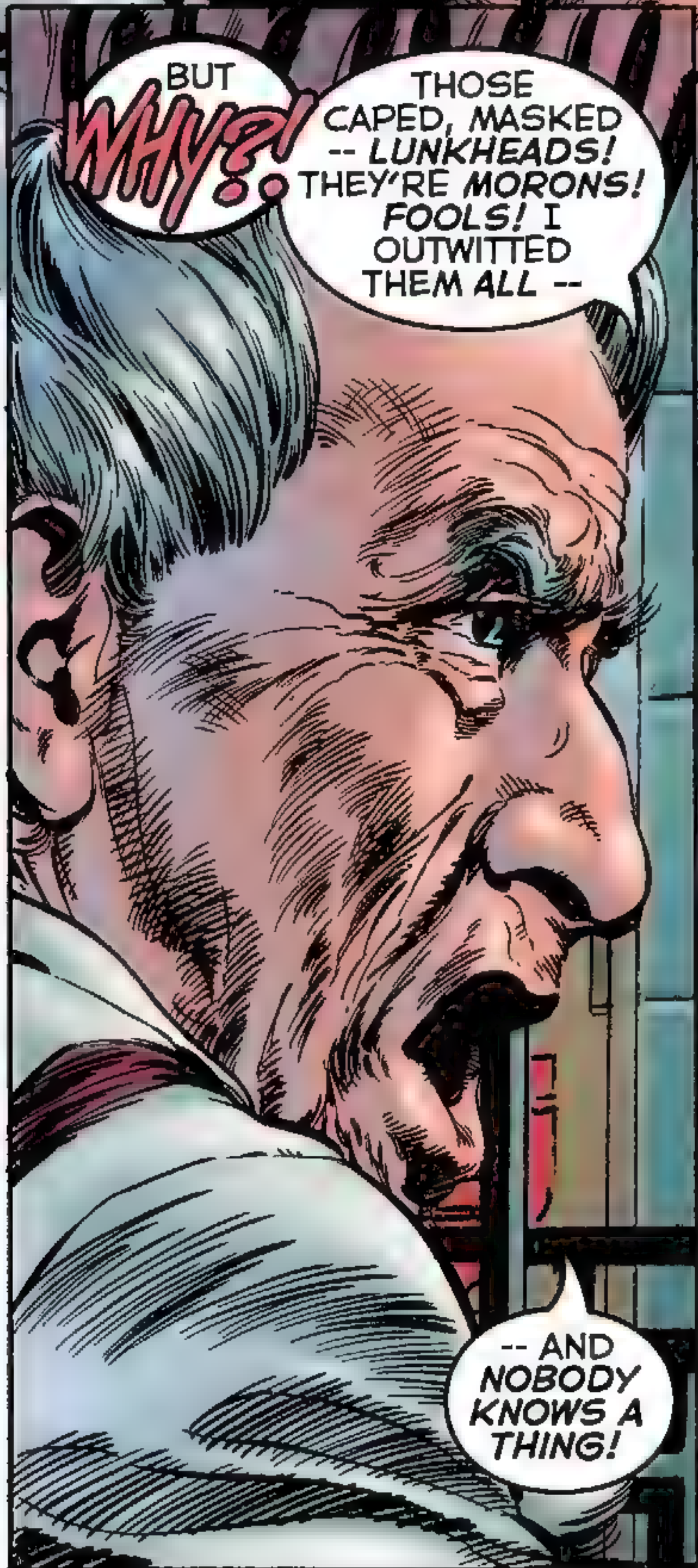
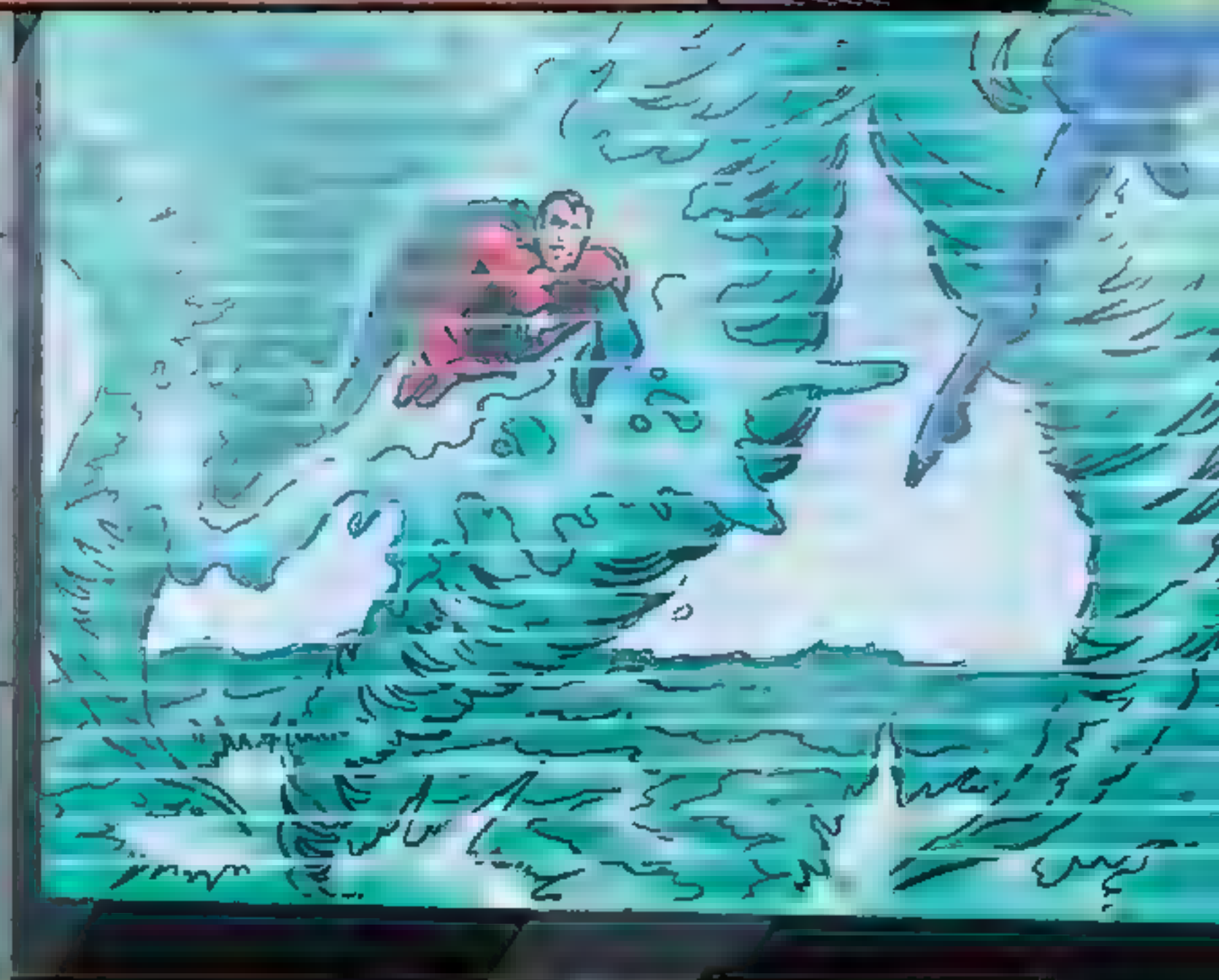
-- THEY SHOULD BE JOYOUS, SHOULD BE EXPERIENCES TO BE EMBRACED --

-- TO BE REVELED IN AS MY JUST REWARD AFTER A LIFETIME OF TOIL.

BUT INSTEAD THEY FEEL LIKE -- LIKE HIDING PLACES. LIKE REFUGES AGAINST SOMETHING I'M FLEEING.



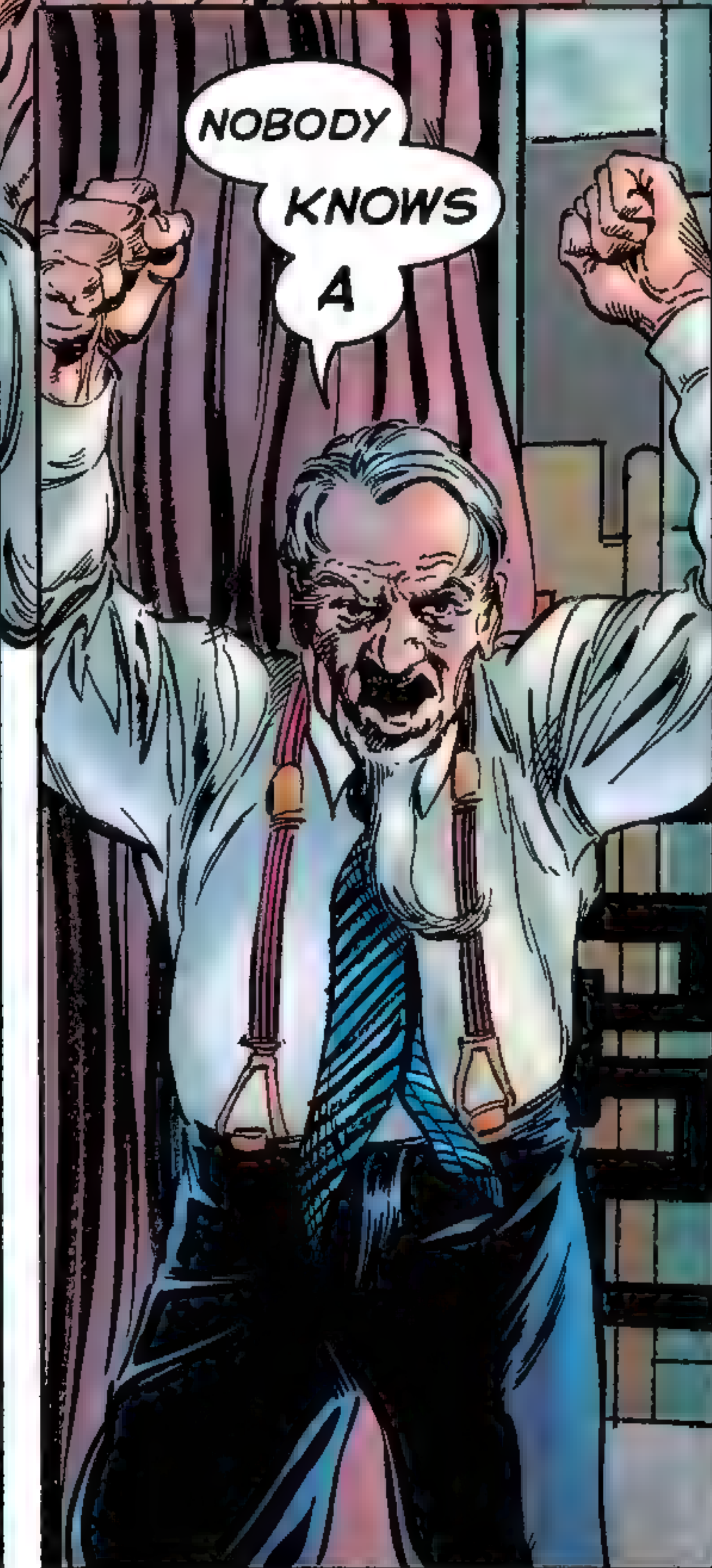
LIKE SHIELDS, LIKE DISGUISES. NOT LIKE DESTINATIONS AT ALL.



BUT **WHY?!**

THOSE CAPED, MASKED -- LUNKHEADS! THEY'RE MORONS! FOOLS! I OUTWITTED THEM ALL --

-- AND NOBODY KNOWS A THING!



NOBODY KNOWS A



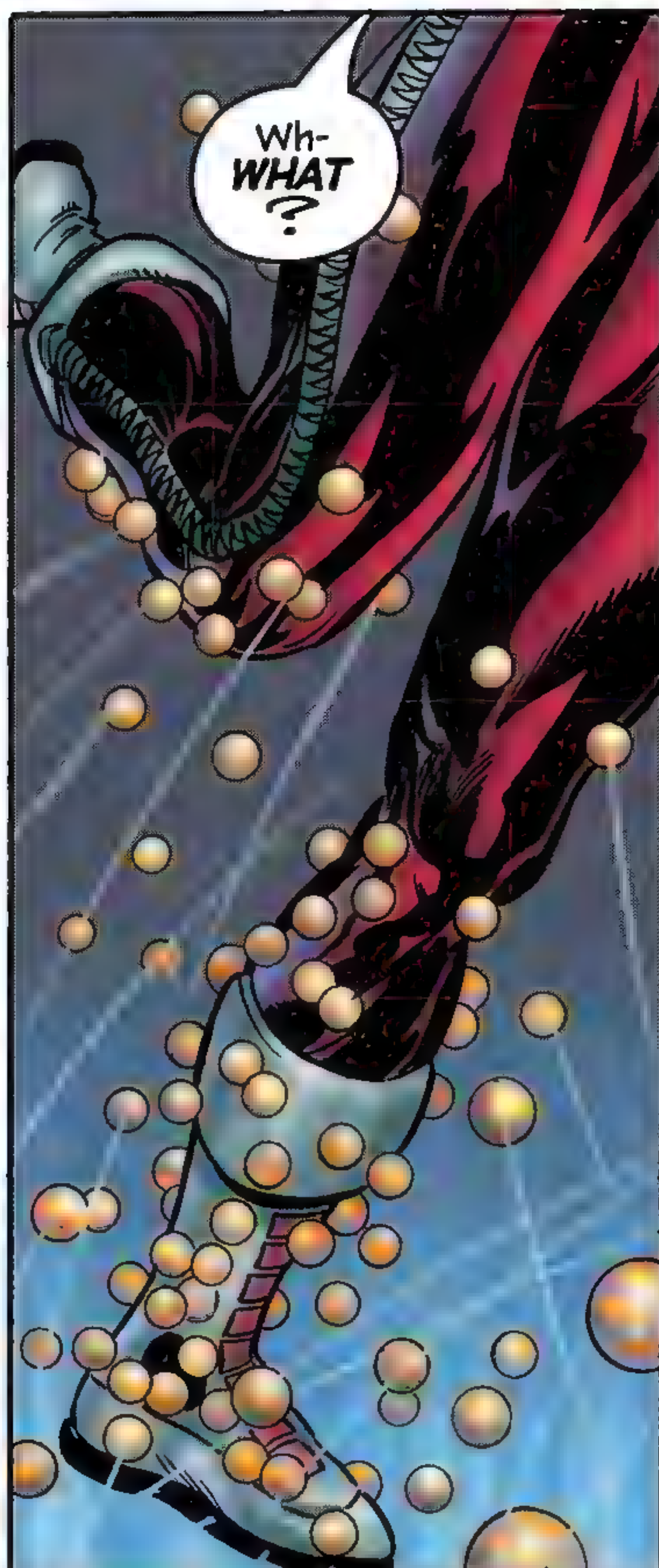
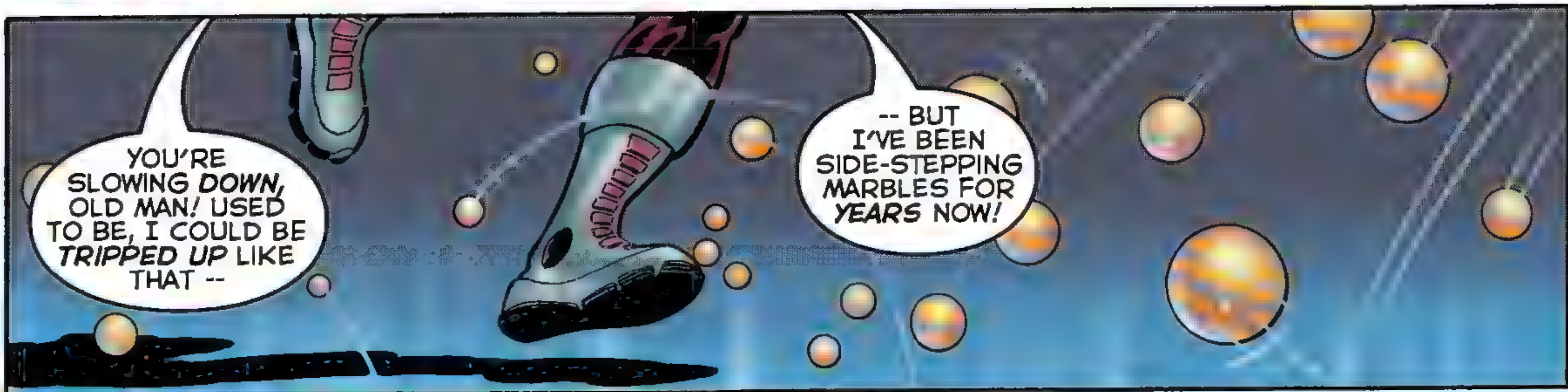
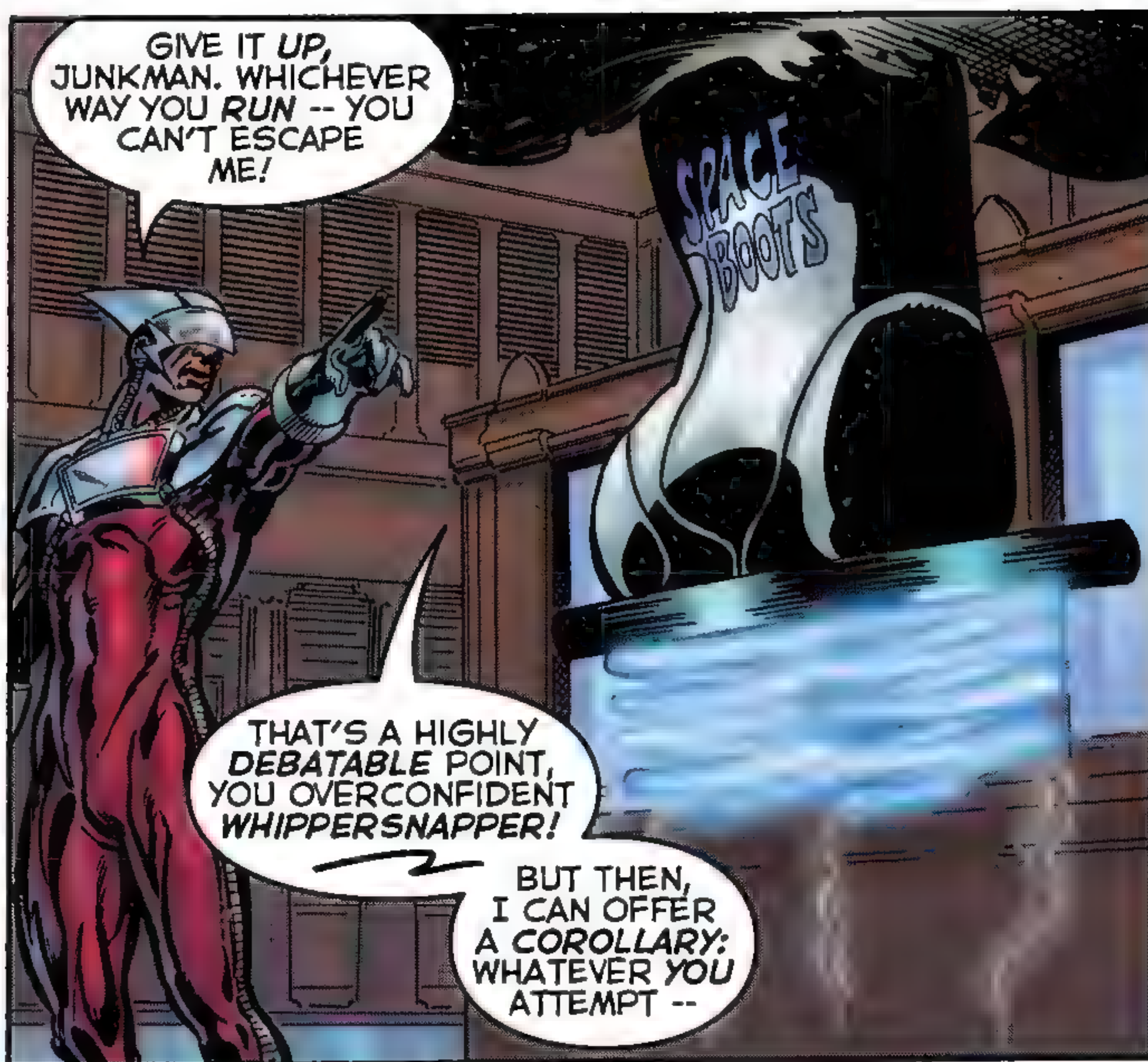
BUT THIS TIME --

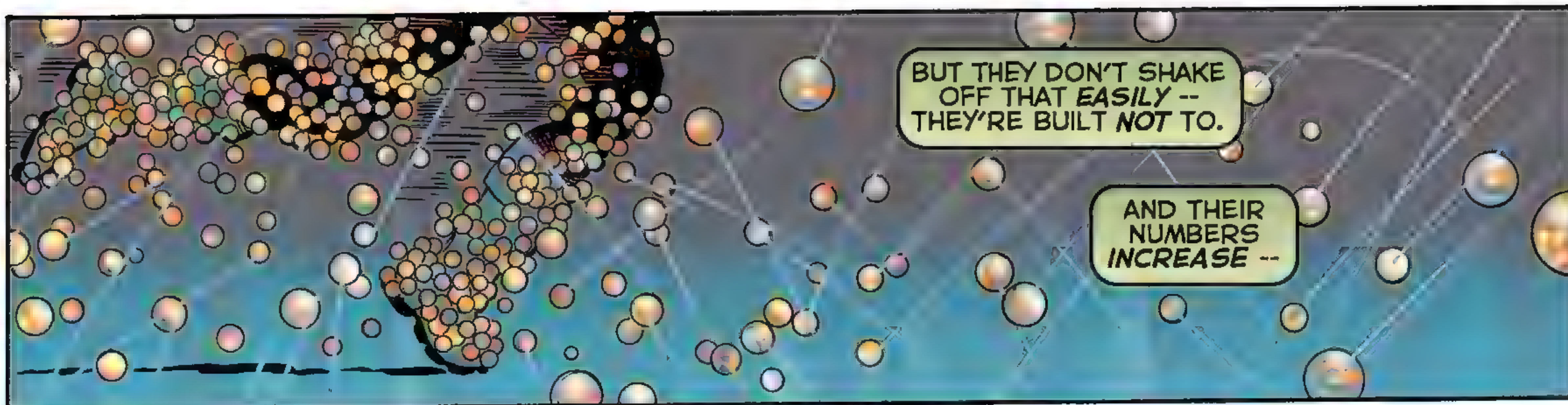
THERE'S A BANK
THERE THAT SUITS MY
NEEDS -- A BANK WITH
SECURITY SYSTEMS
VERY LIKE THE BANK
IN ASTRO CITY.

-- THIS TIME,
THE GRAVITY
INDUCTORS
DON'T FUNCTION
QUITE SO
SPLENDIDLY --

A close-up of two feet wearing green shoes with a black and white geometric pattern and red laces. The feet are positioned as if they are floating or have just been kicked, with the soles of the shoes facing the viewer. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue and white.

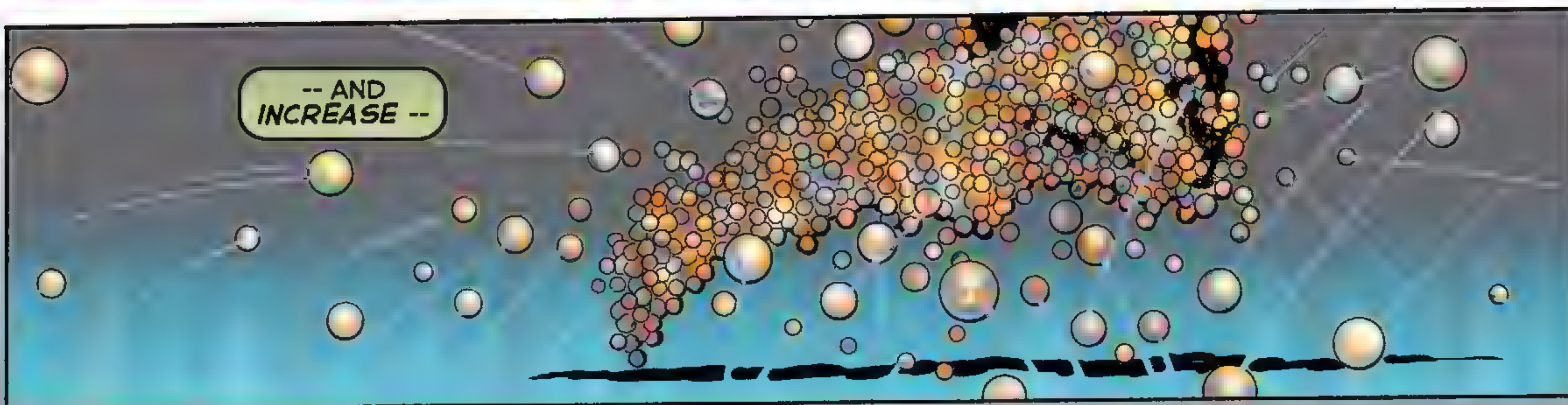
HE'S THERE
IN UNDER TEN
SECONDS.
M.P.H. -- THE
ACCELERATION
ACE. HERO OF
MOTOR CITY.





BUT THEY DON'T SHAKE
OFF THAT *EASILY* --
THEY'RE BUILT *NOT* TO.

AND THEIR
NUMBERS
INCREASE --

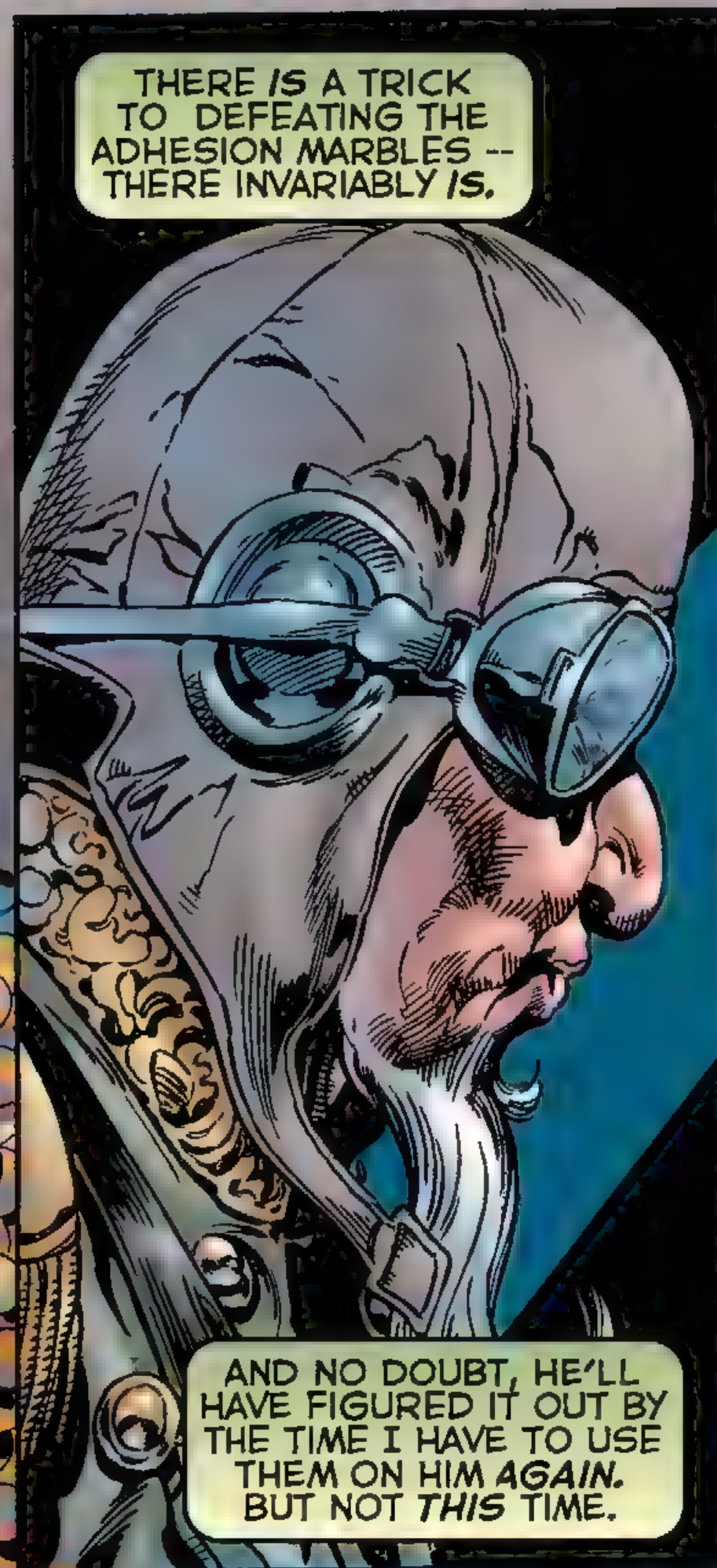


-- AND
INCREASE --

-- AND IN THE
END, I DON'T
EVEN HAVE TO
USE THE SONIC
INVERTER,
TO SHORT OUT
HIS POWER
CONTAINMENT
HARNES.

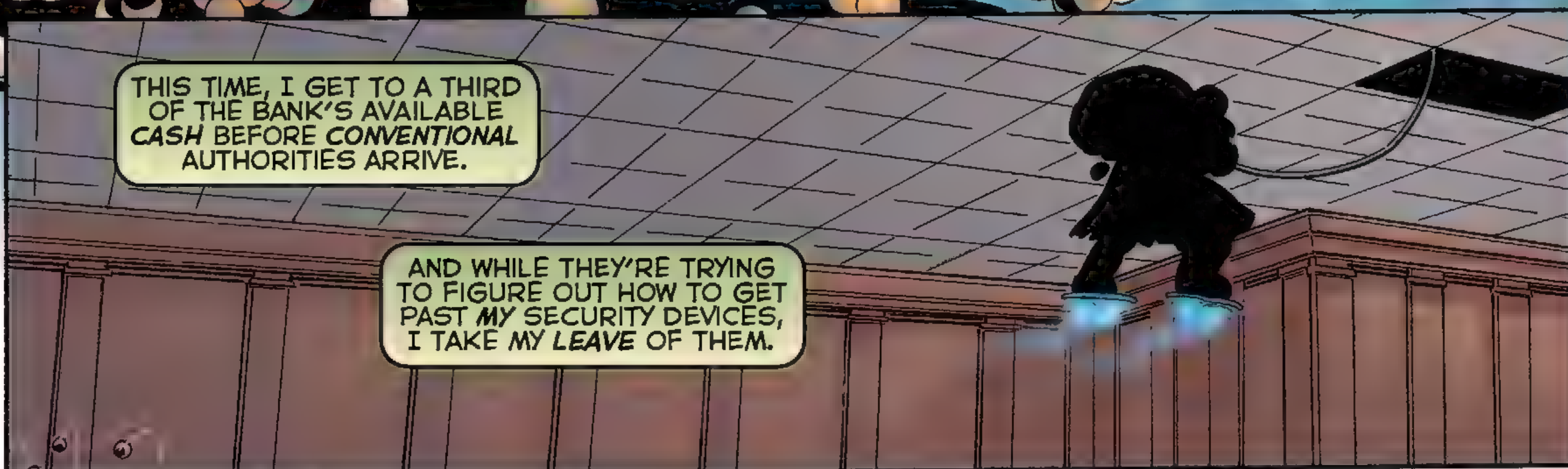


PHYSICAL
POWERS,
PHYSICAL
SOLUTIONS.



THERE *IS* A TRICK
TO DEFEATING THE
ADHESION MARBLES --
THERE INVARIABLY *IS*.

AND NO DOUBT, HE'LL
HAVE FIGURED IT OUT BY
THE TIME I HAVE TO USE
THEM ON HIM AGAIN.
BUT NOT *THIS* TIME.



THIS TIME, I GET TO A THIRD
OF THE BANK'S AVAILABLE
CASH BEFORE CONVENTIONAL
AUTHORITIES ARRIVE.

AND WHILE THEY'RE TRYING
TO FIGURE OUT HOW TO GET
PAST MY SECURITY DEVICES,
I TAKE MY LEAVE OF THEM.

MY NEXT STOP IS
NEW ORLEANS, AND A
JEWELRY STORE IN THE
FRENCH QUARTER.

BUT THE MOST PROMINENT
LOCAL HERO *THERE* IS
RATHER MORE OF A
DETECTIVE THAN M.P.H.

HE INTERCEPTS ME BEFORE
I EVEN REACH MY TARGET.

I KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE AFTER,
JUNKMAN. BUT YOU'RE
NOT GOING TO GET
IT.

"BUT YOU'RE
NOT GOING TO
GET IT."

DOES THAT
MAKE YOU FEEL
GOOD, BLACK RAPIER,
SAYING THINGS LIKE
THAT? DOES IT FEEL
RIGHTEOUS?

THE WORLD BELONGS
TO YOU, IS THAT IT? IT'S
JUST AND RIGHT THAT OLD
FOSSILS LIKE ME SHOULD
YIELD TO THE NEXT
GENERATION?

THAT'S NEITHER
HERE NOR *THERE*,
JUNKMAN. BUT YOU
WON'T BE BEATING ME
WITH CHILDREN'S
TOYS.

I WON'T, *eh?*
WHY NOT? YOU
CERTAINLY WON'T
BE THE FIRST!

WHRR

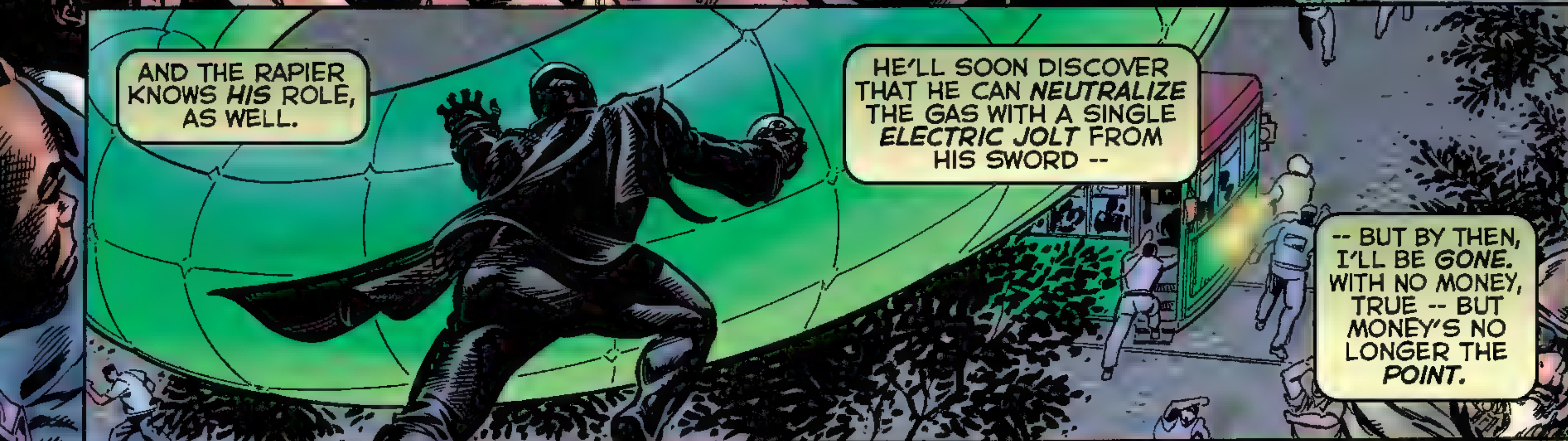
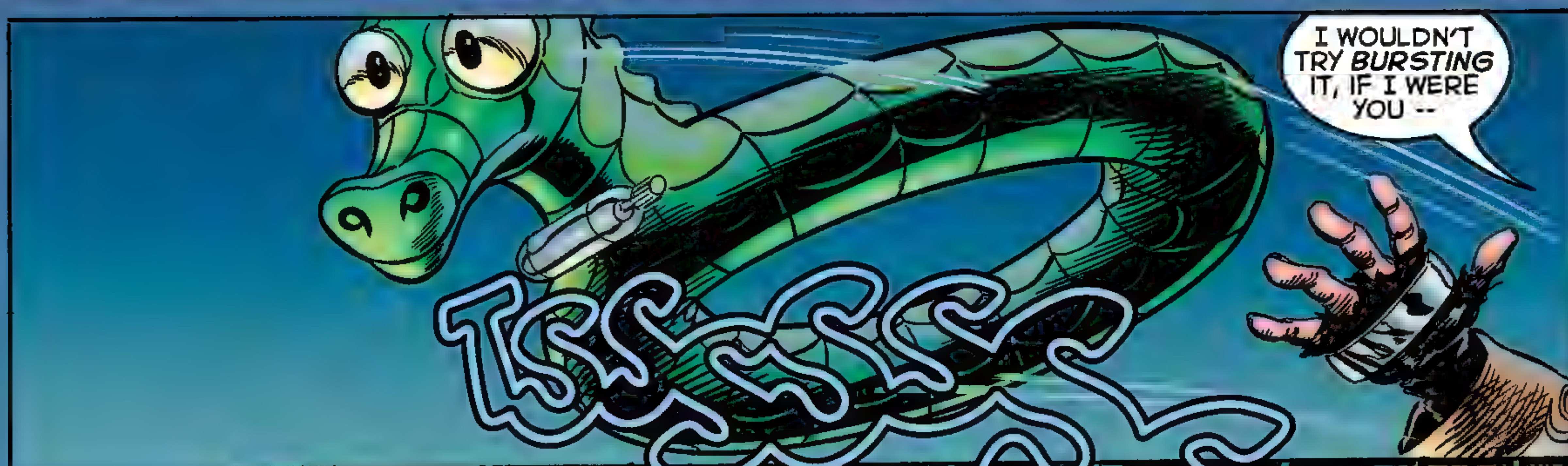
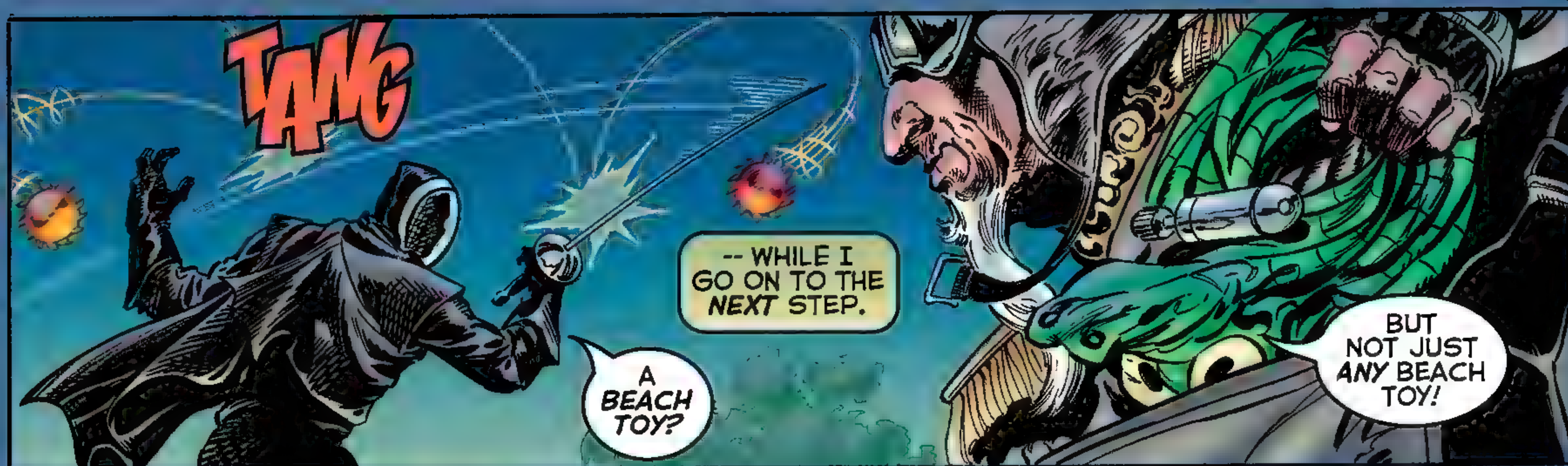
WHRR

THE WHIRLI-BLADES WON'T
STOP HIM, I KNOW. BUT
THEY'RE NOT MEANT TO.

KTANG

TANG

THEY'RE MERELY
MEANT TO
OCCUPY HIM --





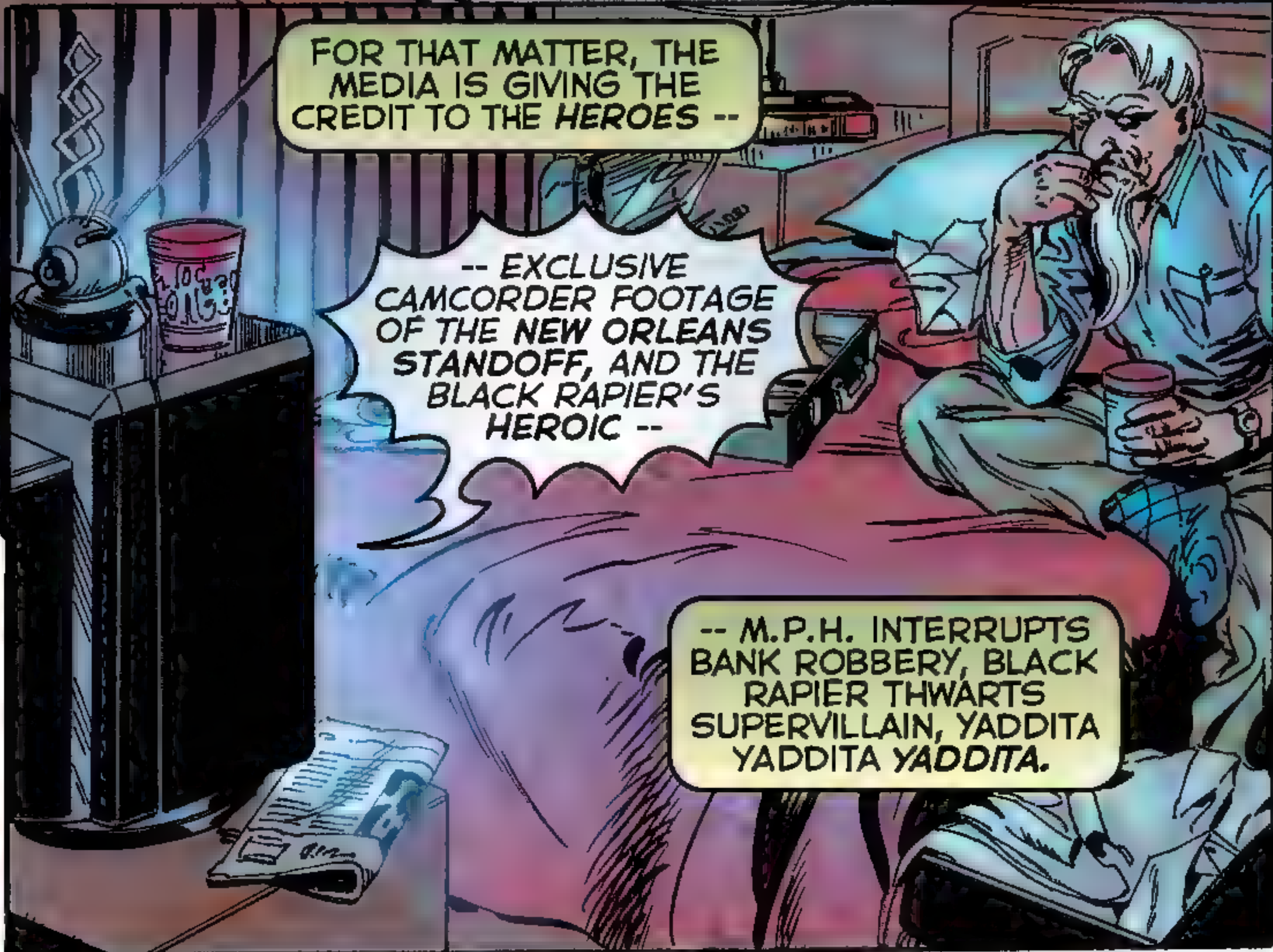
THEY'RE STARTING TO PUT IT TOGETHER.

-- DARING TWILIGHT BATTLE BETWEEN THE BLACK RAPIER AND THE NOTORIOUS JUNKMAN --

THEY'VE REALIZED THE FIRST BANK WAS MINE -- AND THEY'RE EVEN STARTING TO FIGURE OUT HOW I DID IT.



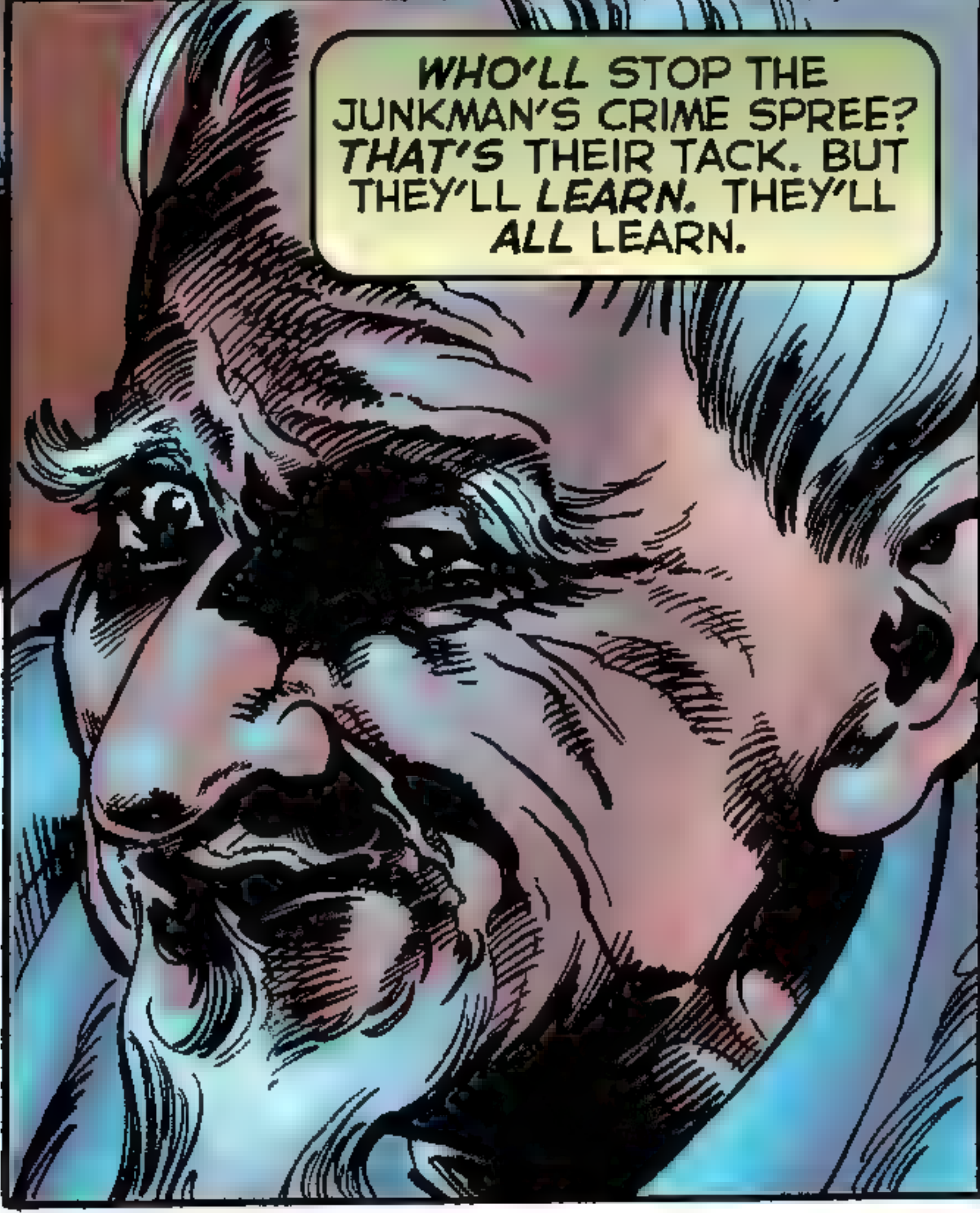
I CAN JUST PICTURE YOUNG YUMIKO -- YOU SEE, SENHOR, THEY WILL CATCH HIM NOW...



FOR THAT MATTER, THE MEDIA IS GIVING THE CREDIT TO THE HEROES --

-- EXCLUSIVE CAMCORDER FOOTAGE OF THE NEW ORLEANS STANDOFF, AND THE BLACK RAPIER'S HEROIC --

-- M.P.H. INTERRUPTS BANK ROBBERY, BLACK RAPIER THWARTS SUPERVILLAIN, YADDITA YADDITA YADDITA.



WHO'LL STOP THE JUNKMAN'S CRIME SPREE? THAT'S THEIR TACK. BUT THEY'LL LEARN. THEY'LL ALL LEARN.



THAT'S WHAT I'M DOING HERE, FIVE MONTHS TO THE DAY FROM WHEN I LEFT. THAT'S WHY I'M BACK IN ASTRO CITY.

THE ASTROBANK
TOWER LOOKS MUCH
THE SAME AS IT DID
THE LAST TIME.

A FEW MORE
PIGEON
DROPPINGS,
I'M SURE,
SOME MORE
WEATHERING --
BUT NOTHING
I NOTICE.

I HAVE MUCH THE SAME
EQUIPMENT AS LAST
TIME. I'M FOLLOWING
MUCH THE SAME PLAN.

I EVEN FIND
THE SAME
ACCESS
HATCH.
IT'S EASY
TO TELL --

-- FROM THE SCRATCHES
AND SCRAPES I LEFT
GETTING IN BEFORE. AND
AFTER DETROIT, AFTER
THEY RECONSTRUCTED
MY PATH --

-- I'M SURE THEY
KNOW IT, TOO.

HEYA,
JUNKMAN --

 ASTRO



-- YOU DIDN'T SERIOUSLY THINK NOBODY WOULD BE WATCHING FOR YOU, DID YOU?

AFTER A WHILE, THEY ALL START TO SOUND ALIKE.

WHY, NO, JACK-IN-THE-BOX! I FULLY EXPECTED YOU! AND MORE THAN THAT --

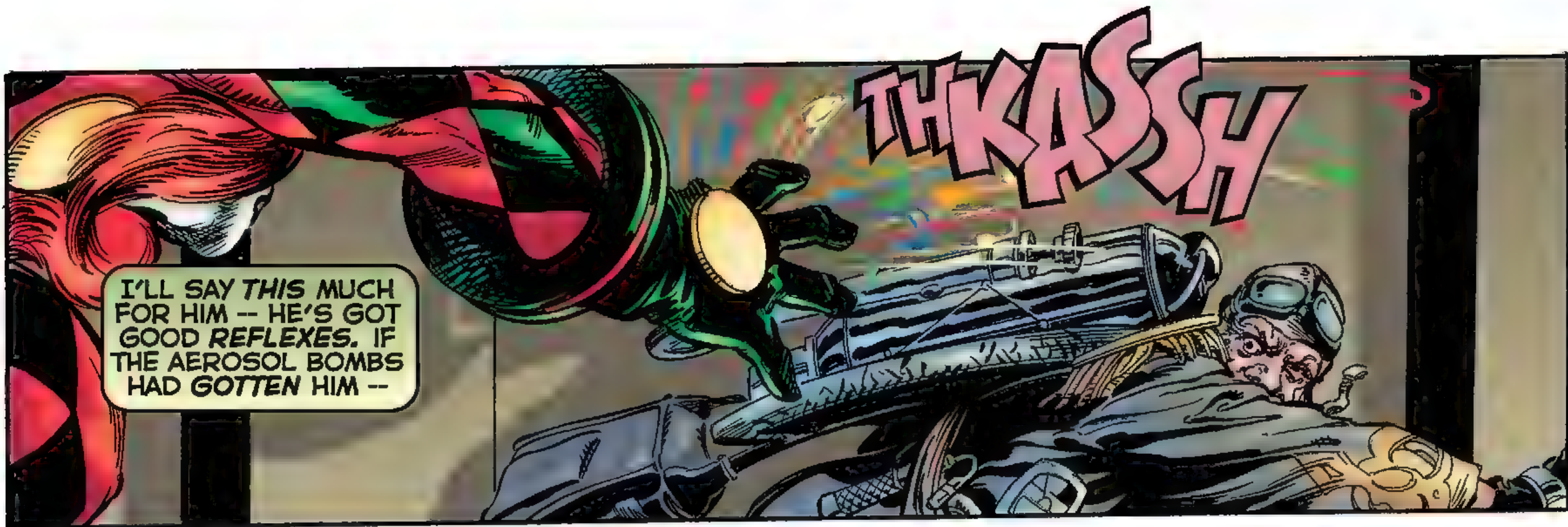


-- I CAME PREPARED!

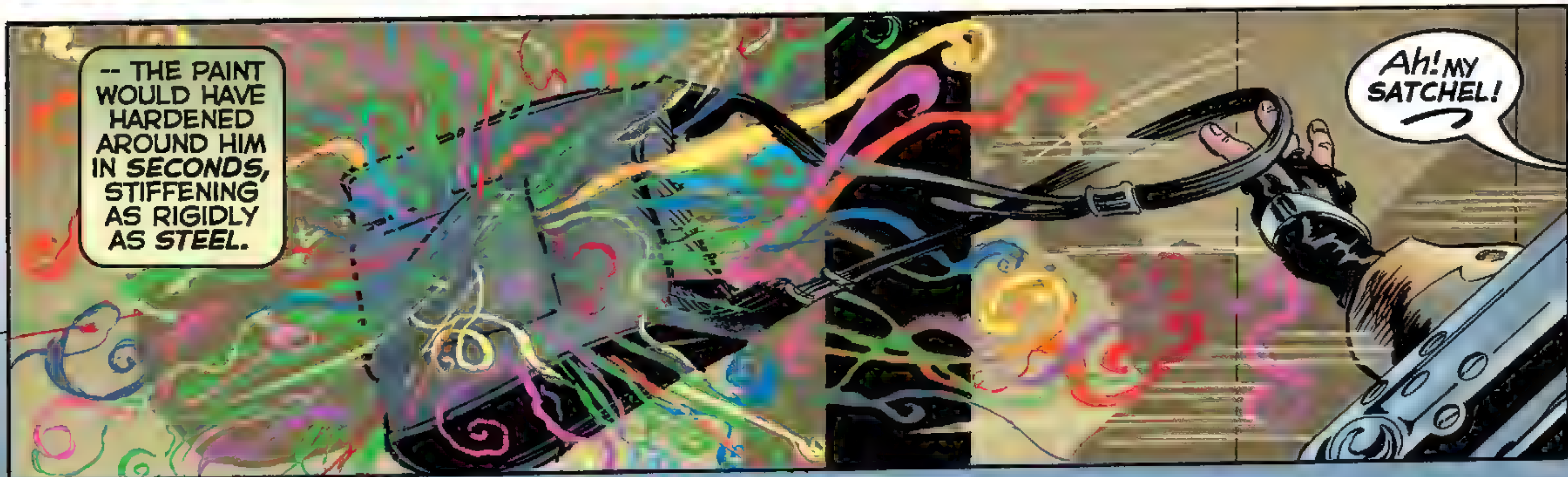


JUNKMAN, JUNKMAN, JUNKMAN --

-- IT'S JUST NOT THAT EASY! I'VE HAD PRACTICE DODGING AERIAL EXPLOSIONS -- RECENTLY, EVEN!

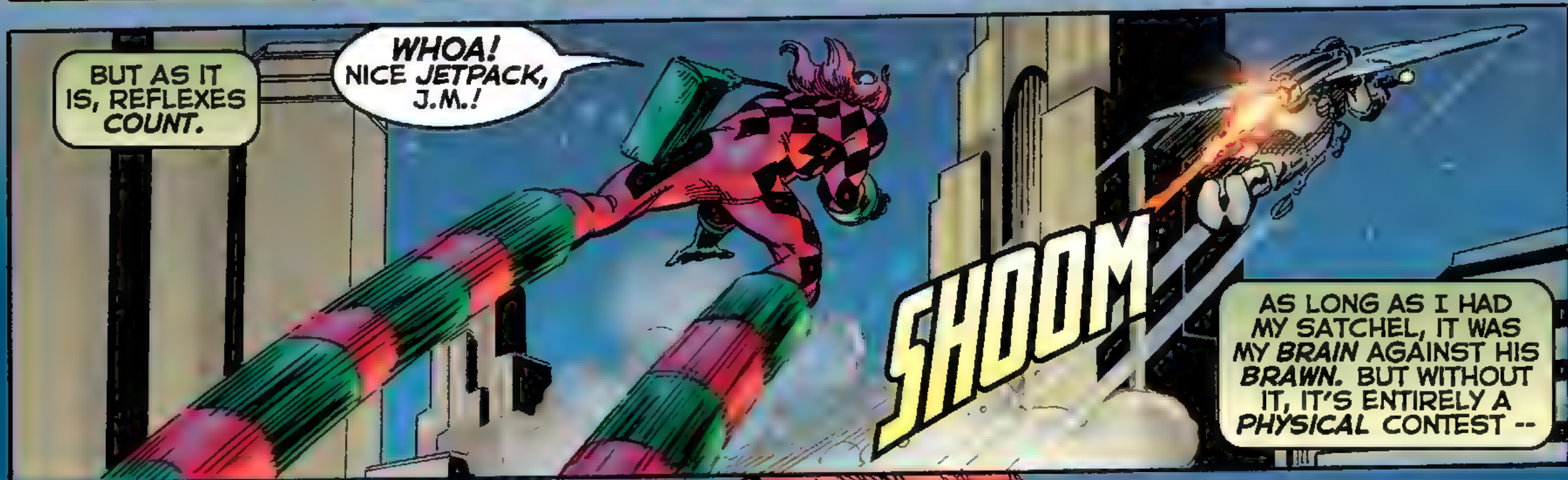


I'LL SAY *THIS* MUCH FOR HIM -- HE'S GOT GOOD *REFLEXES*. IF THE AEROSOL BOMBS HAD GOTTEN HIM --



-- THE PAINT WOULD HAVE HARDENED AROUND HIM IN *SECONDS*, STIFFENING AS RIGIDLY AS *STEEL*.

Ah! MY SATCHEL!



BUT AS IT IS, *REFLEXES* COUNT.

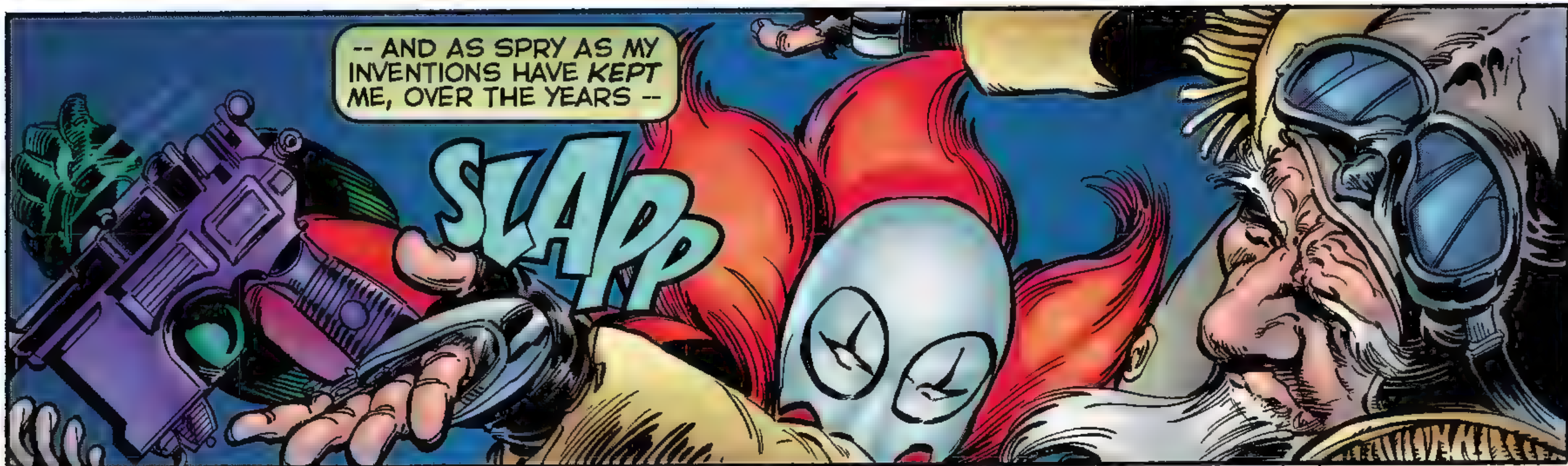
WHOA! NICE JETPACK, J.M.!

AS LONG AS I HAD MY SATCHEL, IT WAS MY BRAIN AGAINST HIS BRAWN. BUT WITHOUT IT, IT'S ENTIRELY A PHYSICAL CONTEST --



-- AND AT THAT --

MIND IF I TAKE A CLOSER LOOK?!



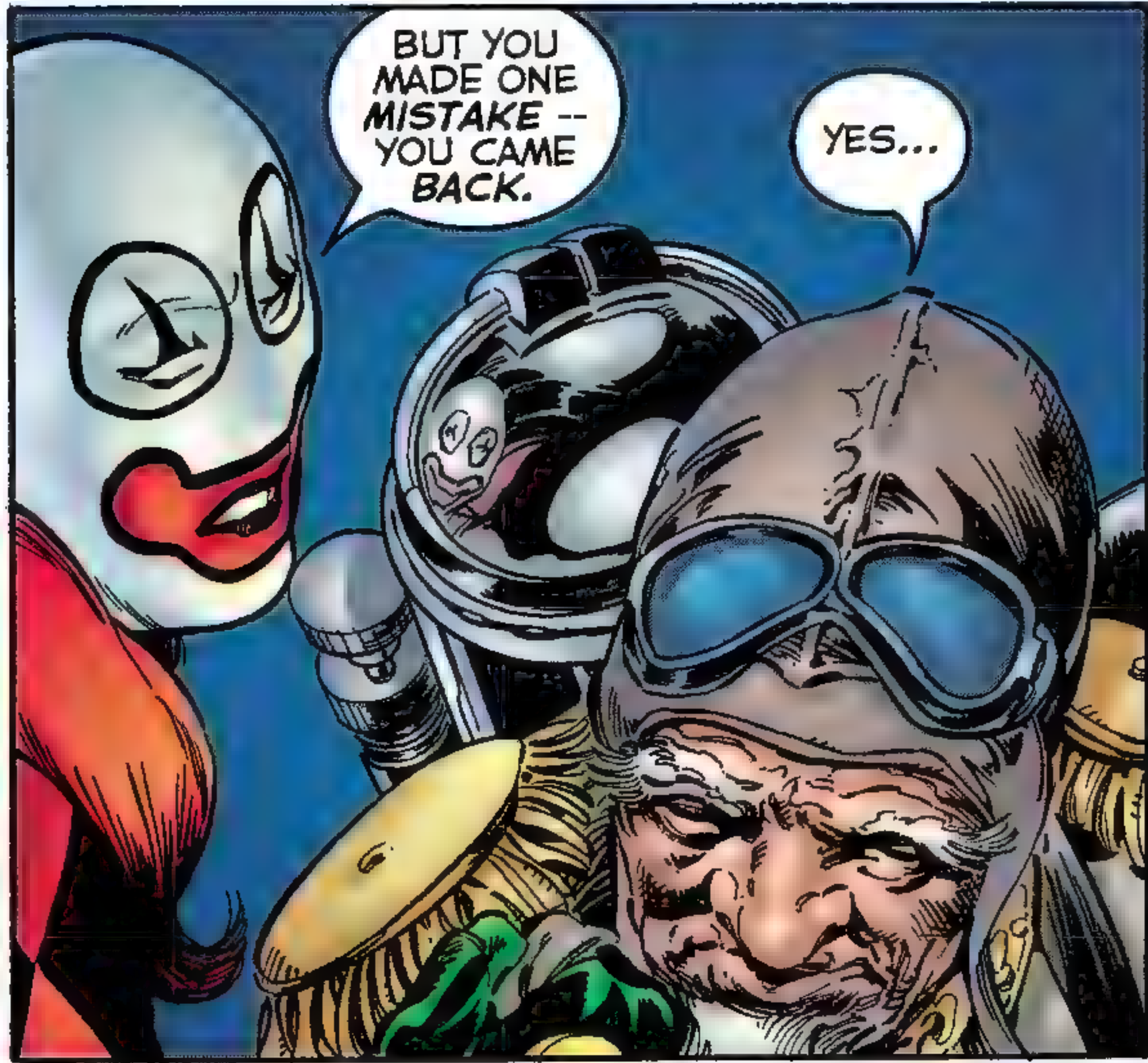
-- AND AS SPRY AS MY INVENTIONS HAVE KEPT ME, OVER THE YEARS --

SLAPP



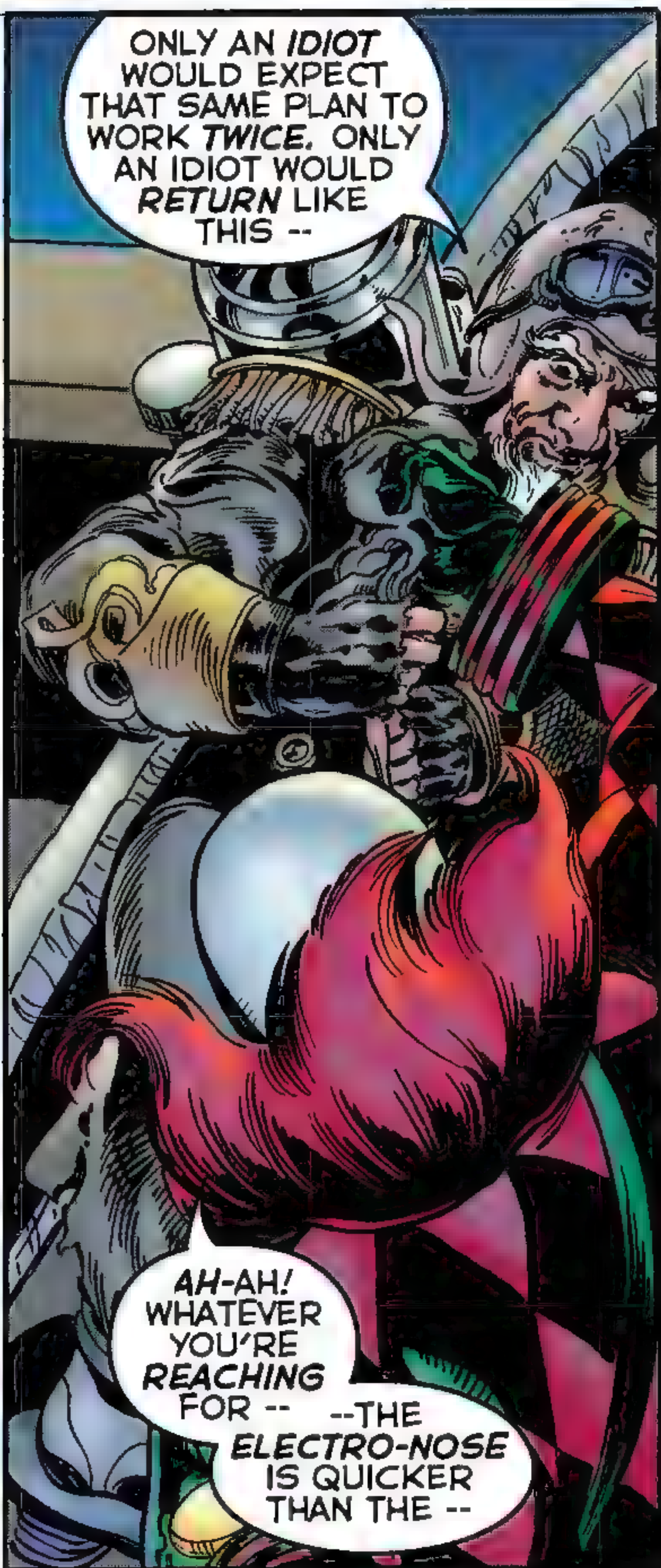
-- THERE'S REALLY ONLY ONE LIKELY OUTCOME.

YOU HAD IT ALL, JUNKMAN. YOU HAD MILLIONS, FREE AND CLEAR, AND WE DIDN'T EVEN SUSPECT YOU.



BUT YOU MADE ONE MISTAKE -- YOU CAME BACK.

YES...

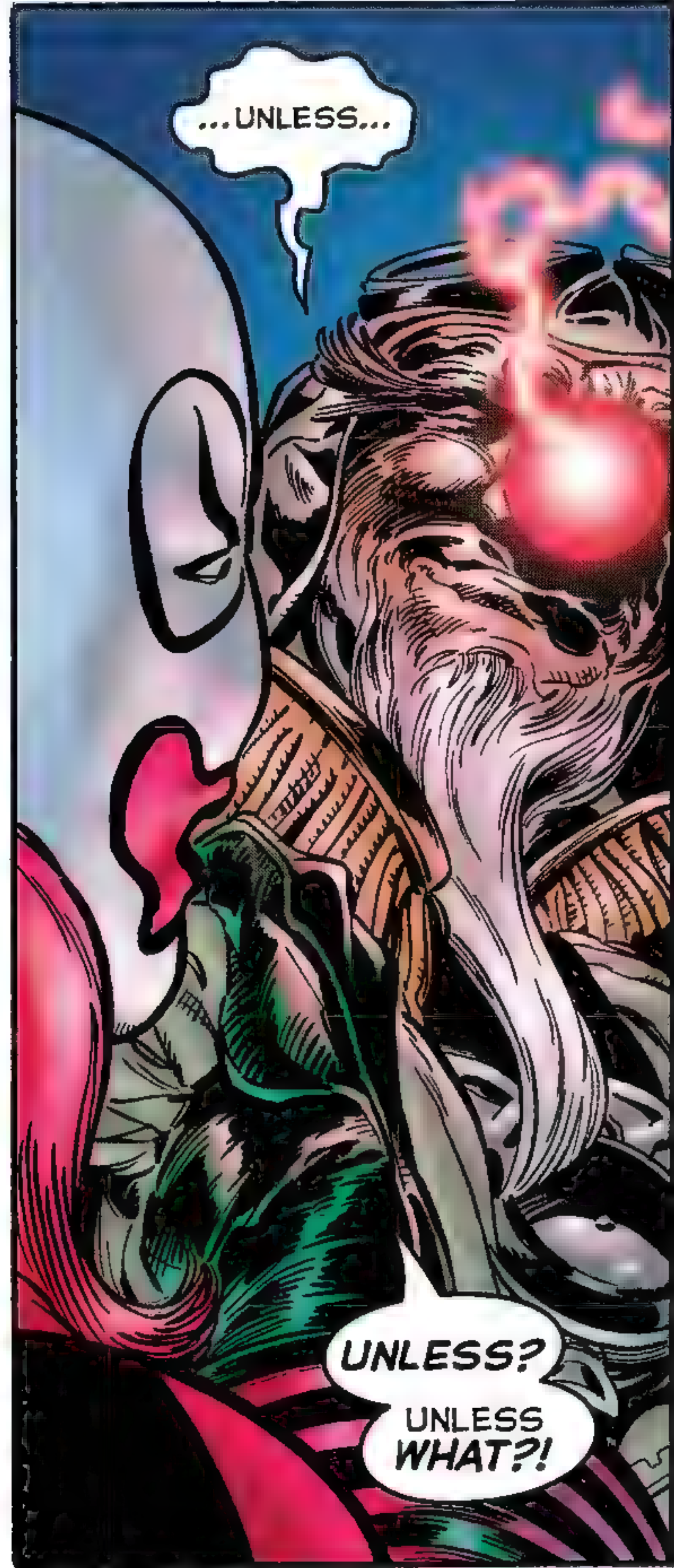


ONLY AN IDIOT WOULD EXPECT THAT SAME PLAN TO WORK TWICE. ONLY AN IDIOT WOULD RETURN LIKE THIS --

AH-AH! WHATEVER YOU'RE REACHING FOR -- --THE ELECTRO-NOSE IS QUICKER THAN THE --



KZAT

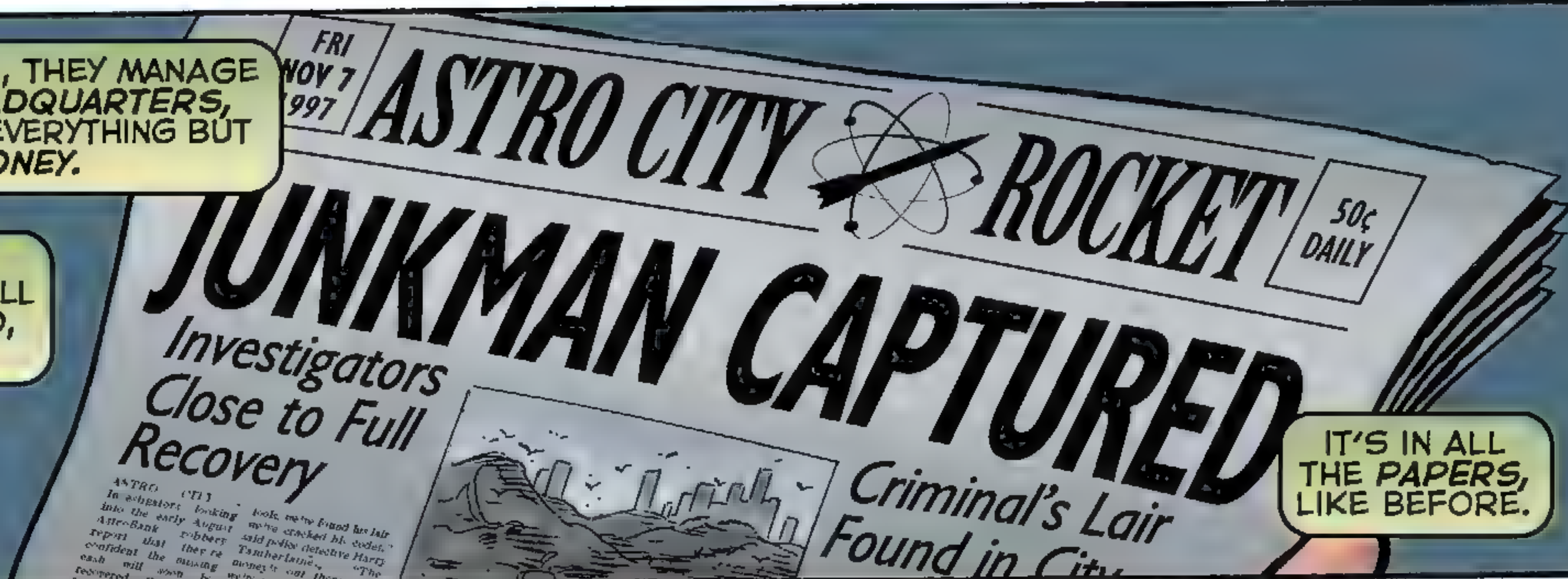


...UNLESS...

UNLESS?
UNLESS WHAT?!

WITH MY SACHEL, THEY MANAGE TO FIND MY HEADQUARTERS, MY SUPPLIES -- EVERYTHING BUT THE MONEY.

AND THEY'RE CONFIDENT THEY'LL FIND THAT, TOO, THEY SAY.



IT'S ON TV, TOO. BUT THIS TIME, THERE'S A DIFFERENCE.

-- NOTED PSYCHIATRISTS WILL TELL US WHY THE JUNKMAN DID IT -- AND ILLUMINATE HIS FATAL FLAW --

THIS TIME, THEY KNOW SOMETHING.

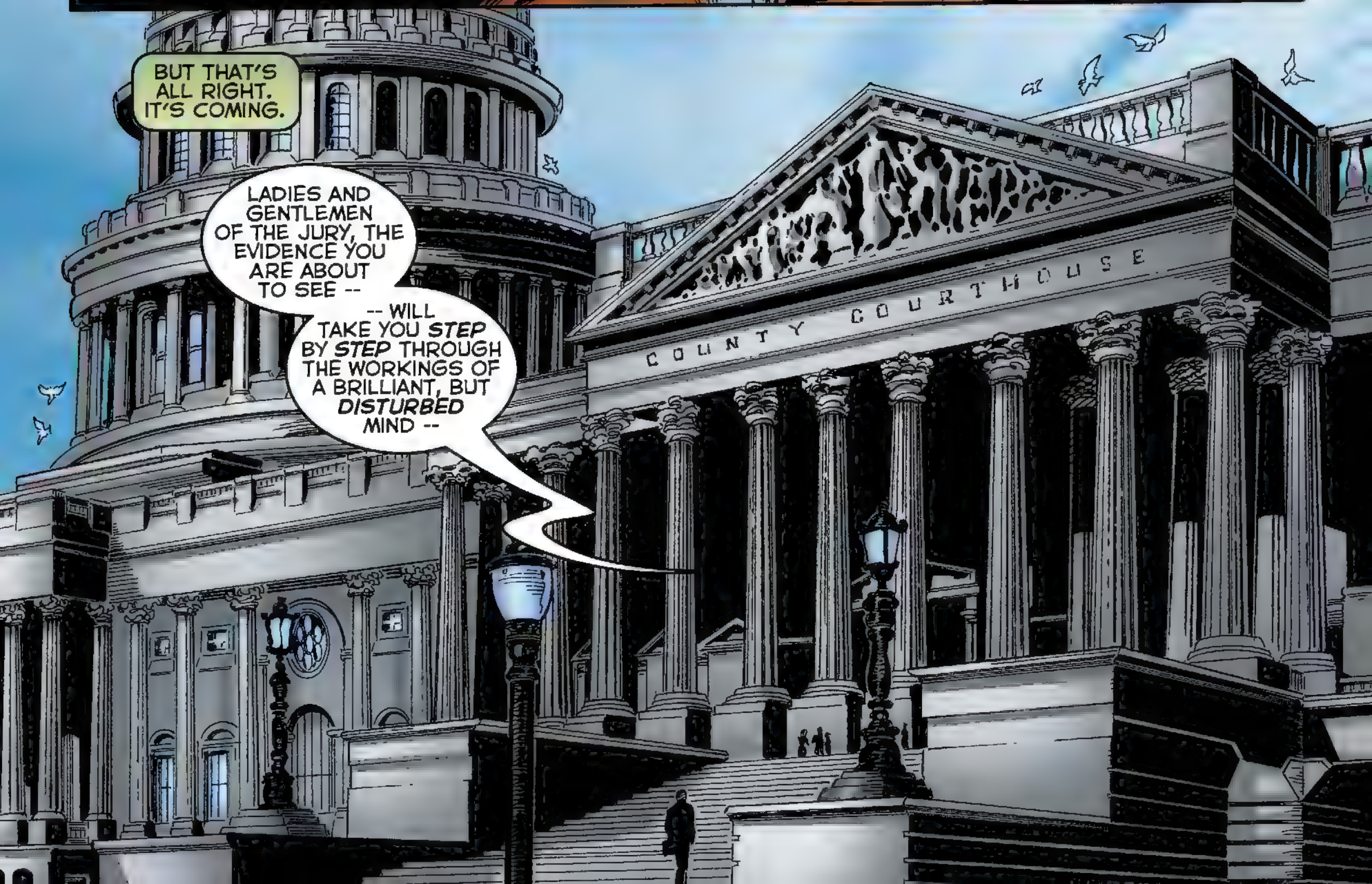
THEY DON'T KNOW EVERYTHING, OF COURSE -- THEY DON'T KNOW HOW I MANAGED IT, FOR INSTANCE.

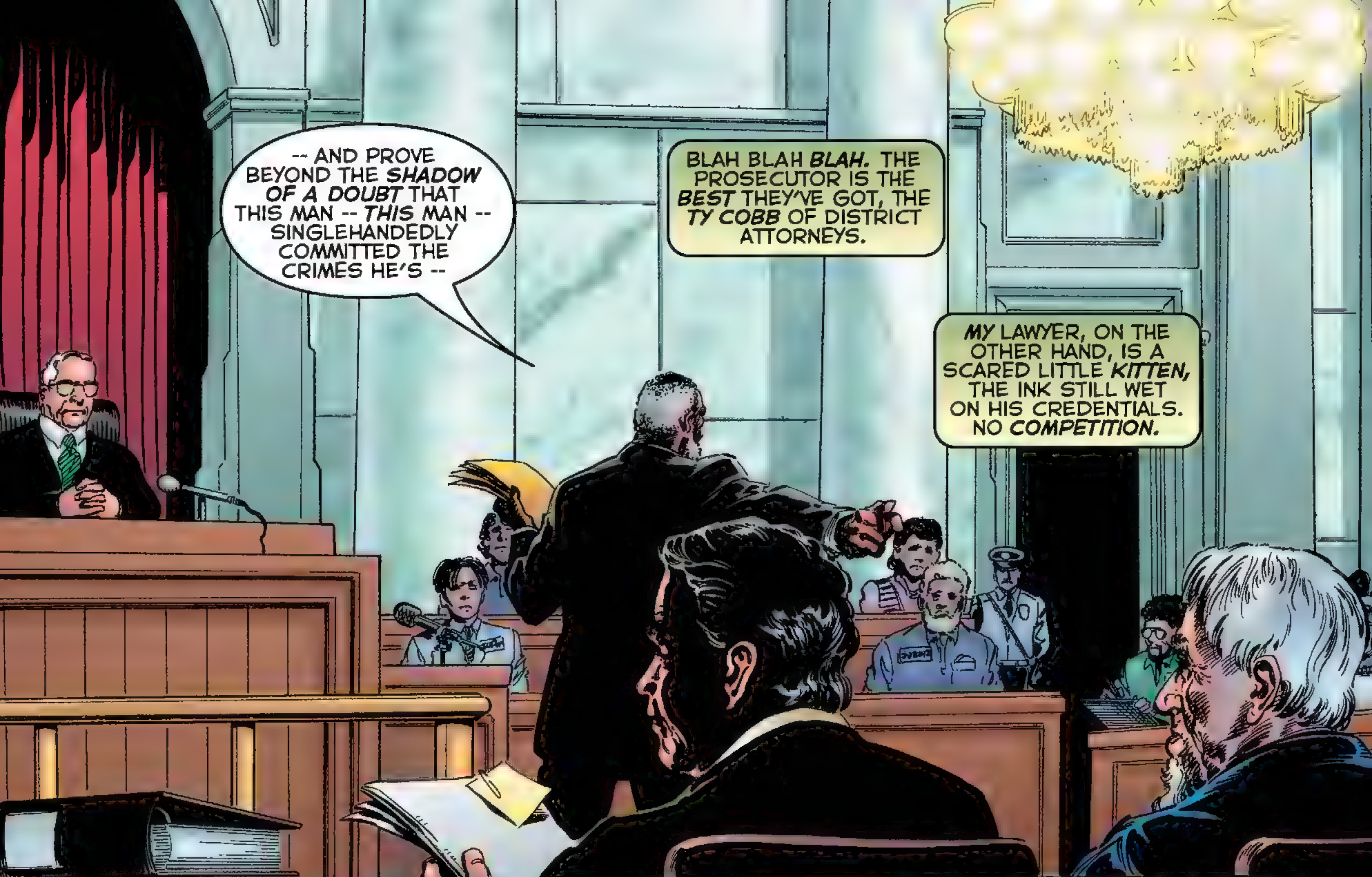
THE POLICE ARE WITHHOLDING THAT, SAVING IT FOR THE TRIAL. AND JACK-IN-THE-BOX ISN'T TALKING, EITHER.

BUT THAT'S ALL RIGHT. IT'S COMING.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN OF THE JURY, THE EVIDENCE YOU ARE ABOUT TO SEE --

-- WILL TAKE YOU STEP BY STEP THROUGH THE WORKINGS OF A BRILLIANT, BUT DISTURBED MIND --

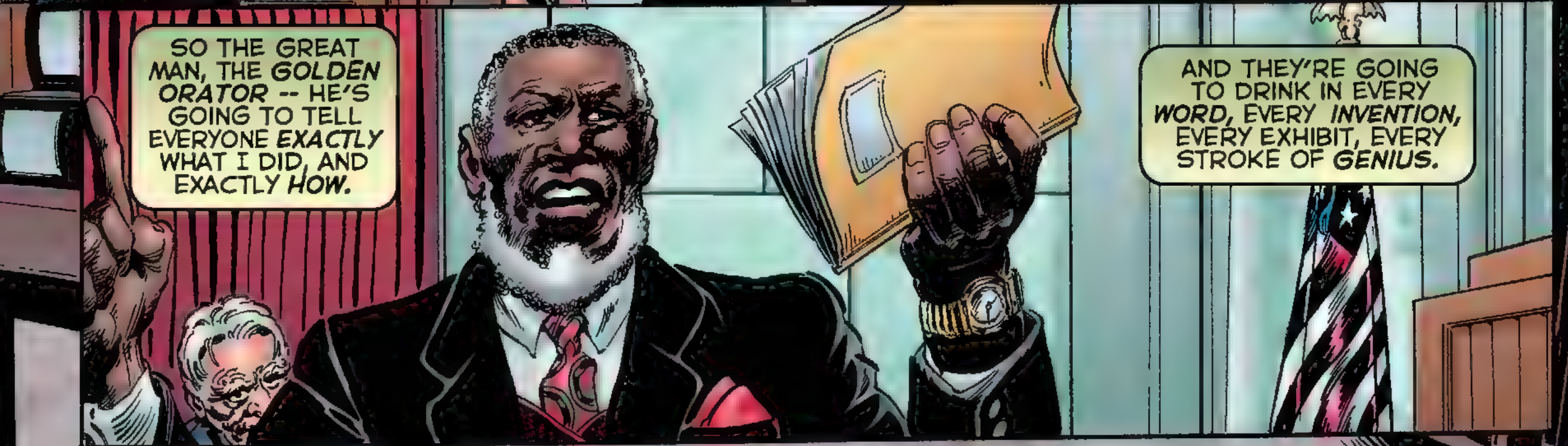




-- AND PROVE BEYOND THE **SHADOW OF A DOUBT** THAT THIS MAN -- **THIS MAN** -- SINGLEHANDEDLY COMMITTED THE CRIMES HE'S --

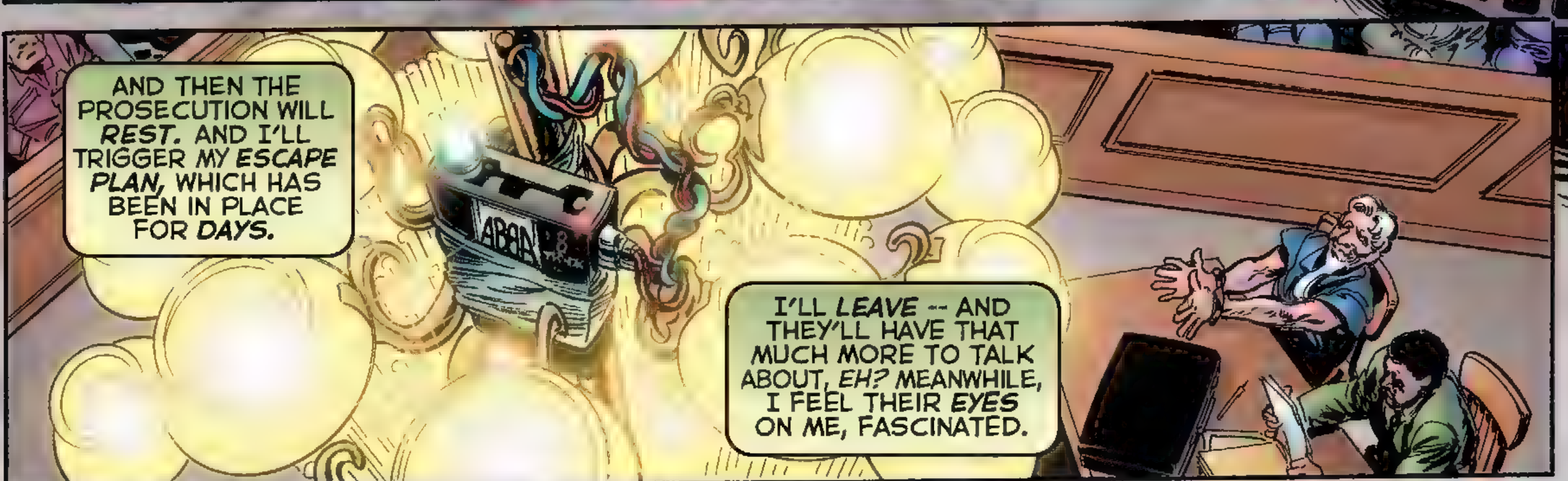
BLAH BLAH BLAH. THE PROSECUTOR IS THE BEST THEY'VE GOT, THE **TY COBB** OF DISTRICT ATTORNEYS.

MY LAWYER, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS A SCARED LITTLE **KITTEN**, THE INK STILL WET ON HIS CREDENTIALS. NO COMPETITION.



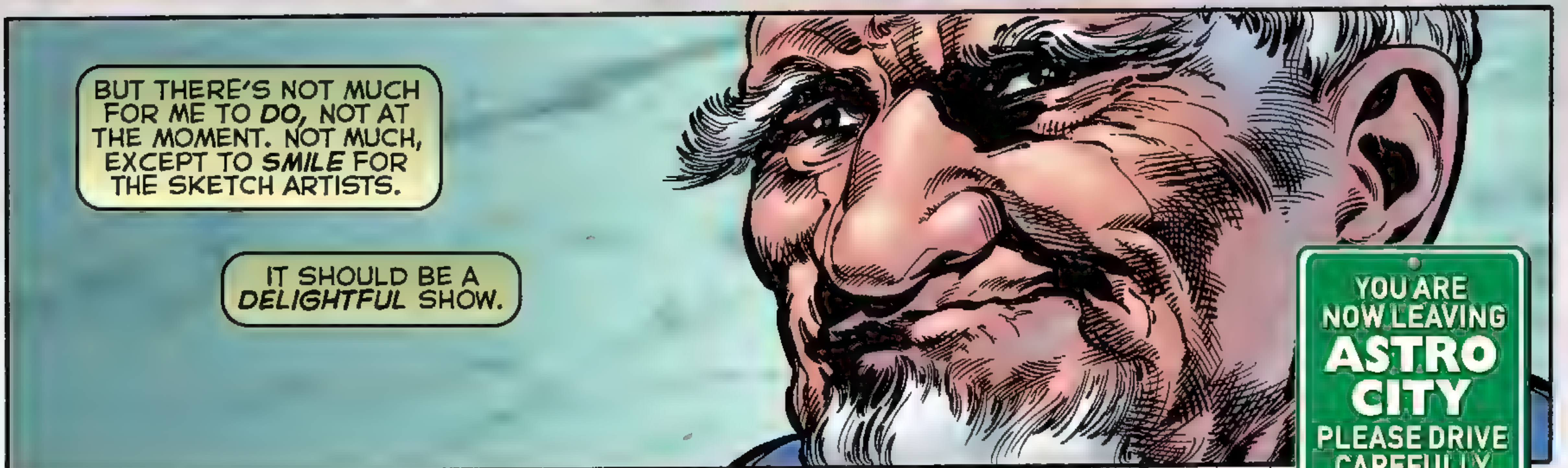
SO THE GREAT MAN, THE **GOLDEN ORATOR** -- HE'S GOING TO TELL EVERYONE EXACTLY WHAT I DID, AND EXACTLY HOW.

AND THEY'RE GOING TO DRINK IN EVERY WORD, EVERY INVENTION, EVERY EXHIBIT, EVERY STROKE OF GENIUS.



AND THEN THE PROSECUTION WILL REST. AND I'LL TRIGGER MY **ESCAPE PLAN**, WHICH HAS BEEN IN PLACE FOR DAYS.

I'LL LEAVE -- AND THEY'LL HAVE THAT MUCH MORE TO TALK ABOUT, EH? MEANWHILE, I FEEL THEIR EYES ON ME, FASCINATED.



BUT THERE'S NOT MUCH FOR ME TO DO, NOT AT THE MOMENT. NOT MUCH, EXCEPT TO **SMILE** FOR THE SKETCH ARTISTS.

IT SHOULD BE A DELIGHTFUL SHOW.

YOU ARE NOW LEAVING
ASTRO CITY
PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY





SERPENT'S TEETH

IN OTHER NEWS, A **CHARITY FUNDRAISER BANQUET** AT THE ROOFGARDEN RESTAURANT WAS **DISRUPTED** TODAY BY THE NOTORIOUS **BRASS MONKEY**.

THE MONKEY ATTEMPTED TO **ROB** BANQUET ATTENDEES, AND WAS ONLY FOILED BY THE INTERVENTION OF **JACK-IN-THE-BOX**.

ACCORDING TO WITNESSES, THE **BRASS MONKEY** APPEARED TO **OVERPOWER** JACK-IN-THE-BOX --

BLACK-TIE CHARITY CHALLENGE

-- AND EVEN APPARENTLY **HURLED** HIM TO HIS **DEATH**.

BUT THE COSTUMED CRIMEFIGHTER **RETURNED**, AND MANAGED TO FORCE THE **BRASS MONKEY** TO DROP HIS LOOT AND **FLEE**.

CHARITY GROUPS HAVE BEEN QUICK TO **PRAISE** JACK-IN-THE-BOX'S DECISIVE ACTION IN SAVING THEIR **RECEIPTS**.

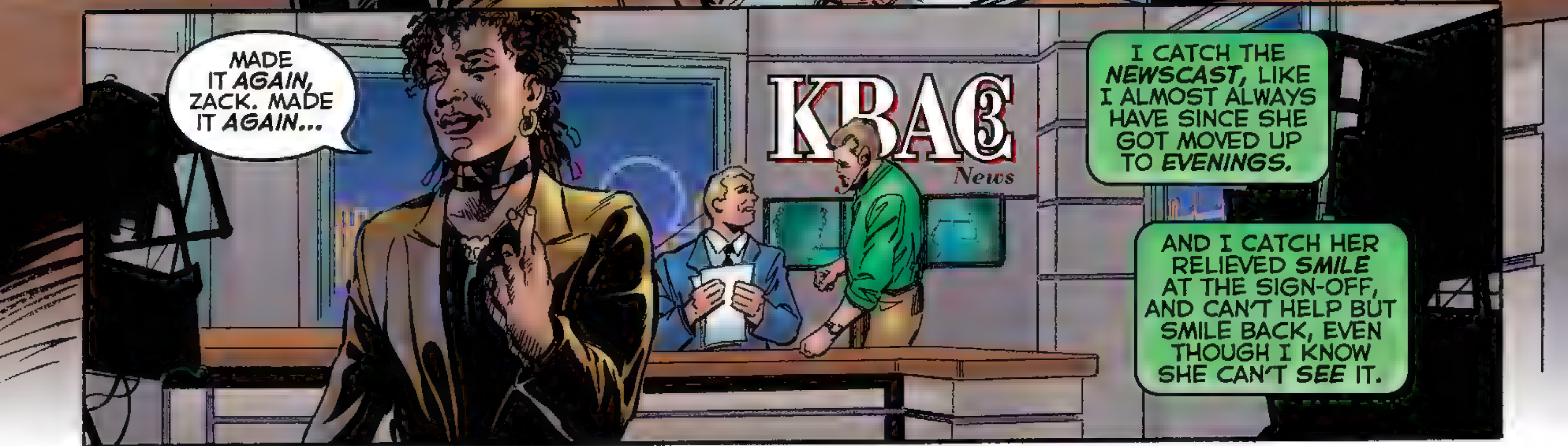




I GUESS THAT'S HOW IT IS WITH JACK-IN-THE-BOX, EH, GORDON? HE ALWAYS BOUNCES BACK.

HA-HA! AND I THOUGHT MY JOKES WERE BAD, TAMRA.

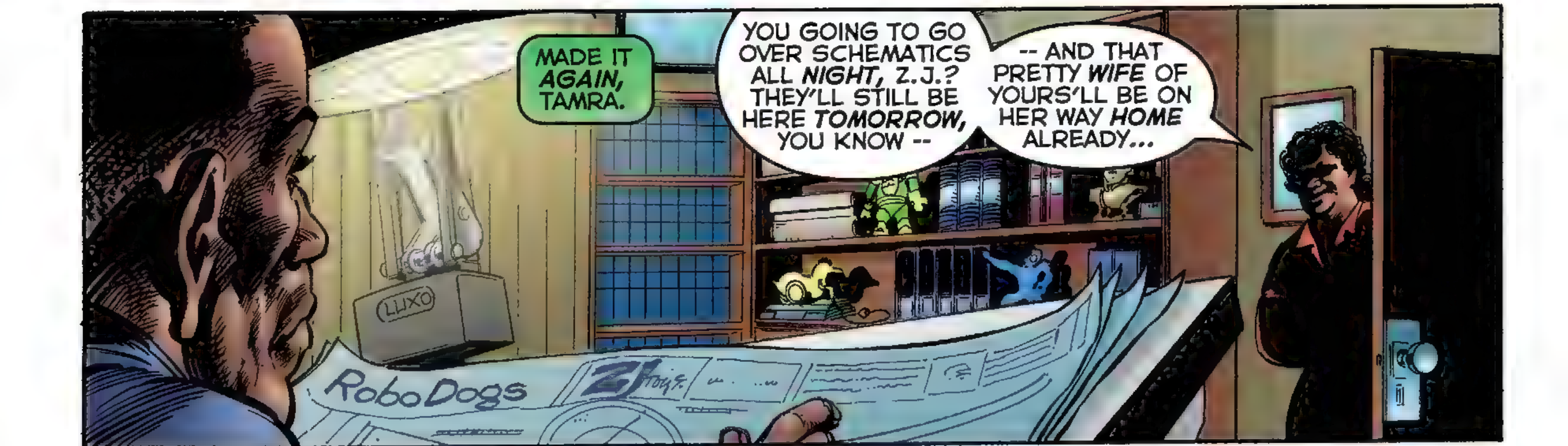
I'M GORDON MEADOWS WITH TAMRA DIXON, FOR KBAC-3, WISHING YOU THE BEST OF EVENINGS.



MADE IT AGAIN, ZACK. MADE IT AGAIN...

I CATCH THE NEWSCAST, LIKE I ALMOST ALWAYS HAVE SINCE SHE GOT MOVED UP TO EVENINGS.

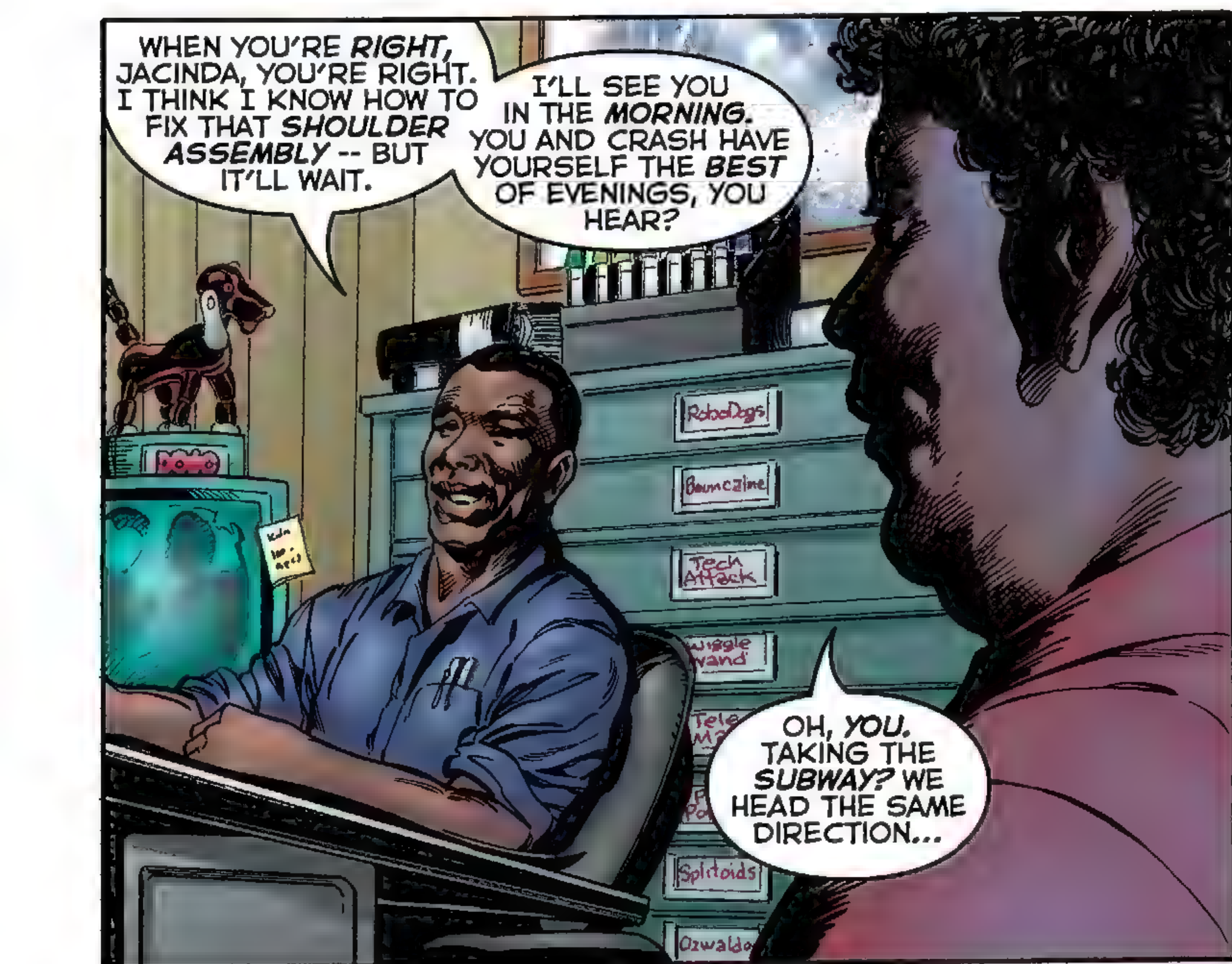
AND I CATCH HER RELIEVED SMILE AT THE SIGN-OFF, AND CAN'T HELP BUT SMILE BACK, EVEN THOUGH I KNOW SHE CAN'T SEE IT.



MADE IT AGAIN, TAMRA.

YOU GOING TO GO OVER SCHEMATICS ALL NIGHT, Z.J.? THEY'LL STILL BE HERE TOMORROW, YOU KNOW --

-- AND THAT PRETTY WIFE OF YOURS'LL BE ON HER WAY HOME ALREADY...



WHEN YOU'RE RIGHT, JACINDA, YOU'RE RIGHT. I THINK I KNOW HOW TO FIX THAT **SHOULDER ASSEMBLY** -- BUT IT'LL WAIT.

I'LL SEE YOU IN THE MORNING. YOU AND CRASH HAVE YOURSELF THE BEST OF EVENINGS, YOU HEAR?

OH, YOU. TAKING THE SUBWAY? WE HEAD THE SAME DIRECTION...



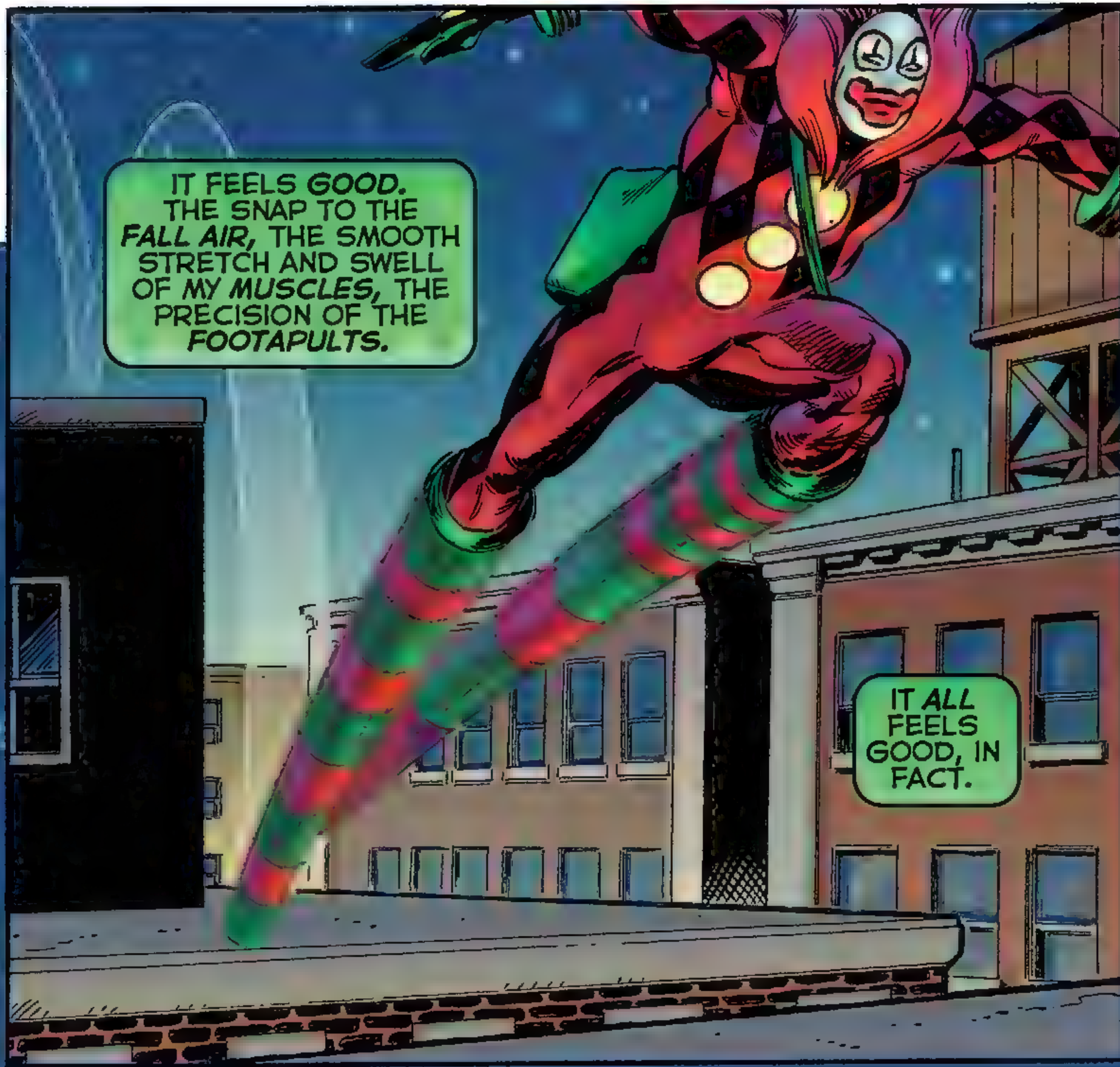
NOT TONIGHT, JACE. I'VE GOT SOME ERRANDS TO RUN. CATCH YOU NEXT TIME, THOUGH.

I DON'T HAVE ANY ERRANDS, OF COURSE. IT'S JUST, WELL --



-- WHY GET
COOPED UP IN
A SUBWAY CAR
WHEN YOU CAN
BE OUT IN THE
NIGHT AIR?

LITERALLY
OUT IN
THE AIR?

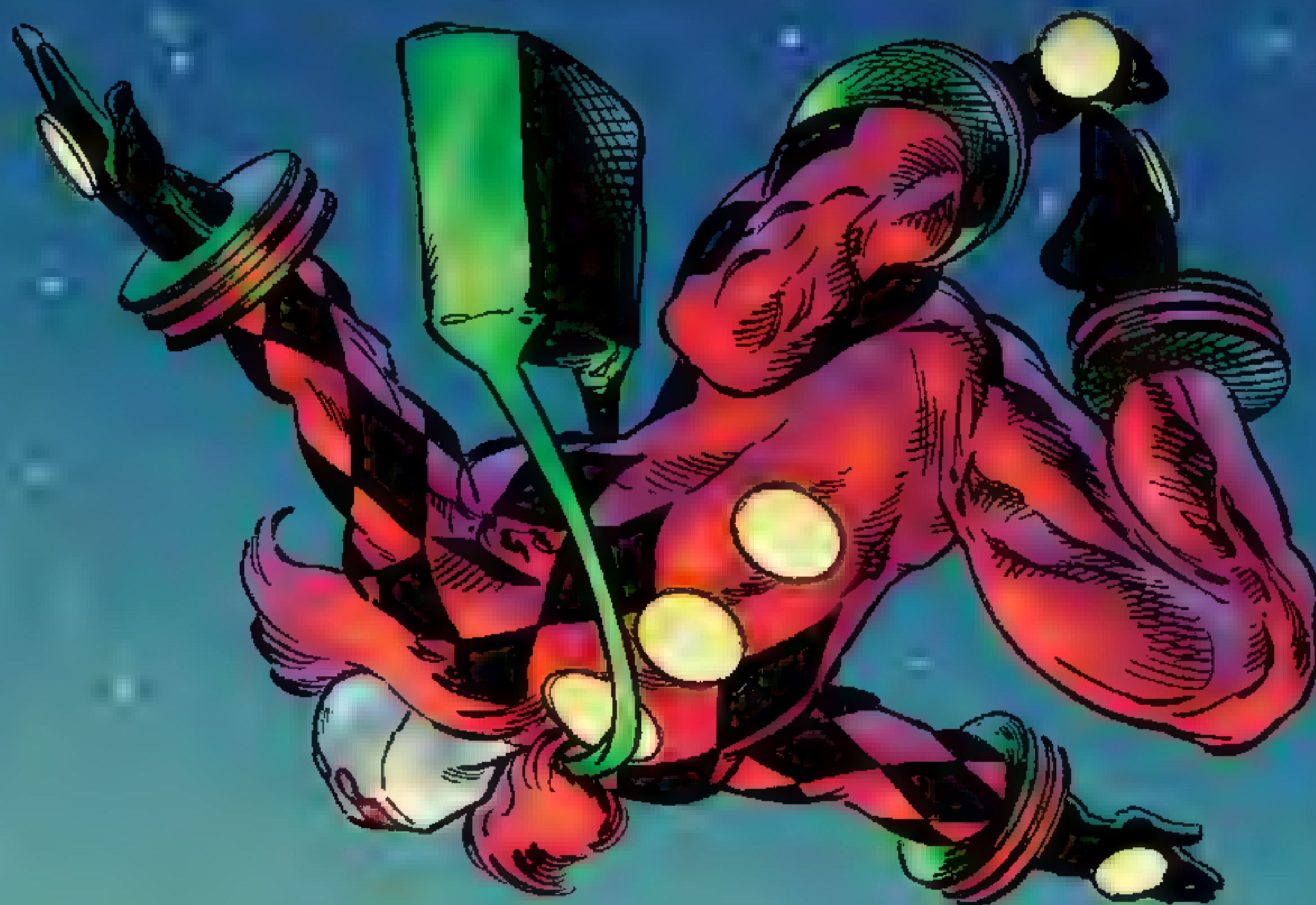


IT FEELS GOOD.
THE SNAP TO THE
FALL AIR, THE SMOOTH
STRETCH AND SWELL
OF MY MUSCLES, THE
PRECISION OF THE
FOOTAPULTS.

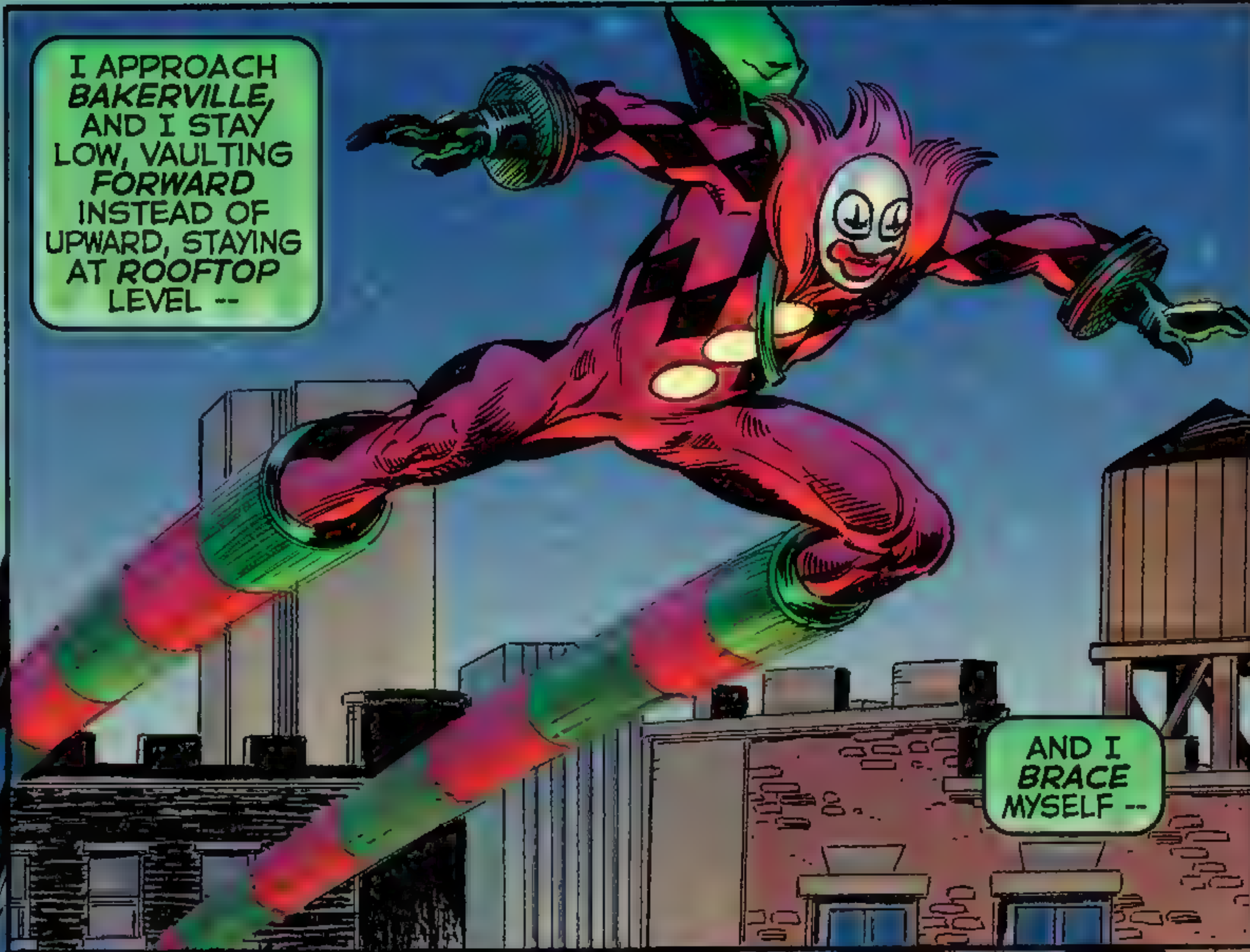
IT ALL
FEELS
GOOD, IN
FACT.

THE MONKEY'S STILL
ON THE LOOSE, BUT
I'LL TRACK HIM DOWN
WITHIN A FEW DAYS.

THE CHRISTMAS LINE
LOOKS TO DO 20%
ABOVE ESTIMATIONS,
AND NEXT SUMMER'S
LINE IS IN THE GROOVE.
AND TAMRA --



-- AHH,
TAMRA.



I APPROACH
BAKERVILLE,
AND I STAY
LOW, VAULTING
FORWARD
INSTEAD OF
UPWARD, STAYING
AT ROOFTOP
LEVEL --

AND I
BRACE
MYSELF --



-- BUT THEY'RE STILL THERE WITHOUT WARNING, AS SUDDEN AS A FLOCK OF SPARROWS --

-- HOOTING AND SHOUTING AS THEY TRY TO KEEP UP.

THE TROUBLE BOYS.



YO, JACKS! YOU LOSIN' THE RACE TONIGHT!

WE UP ON YOU -- WE BEEN PRACTICING!

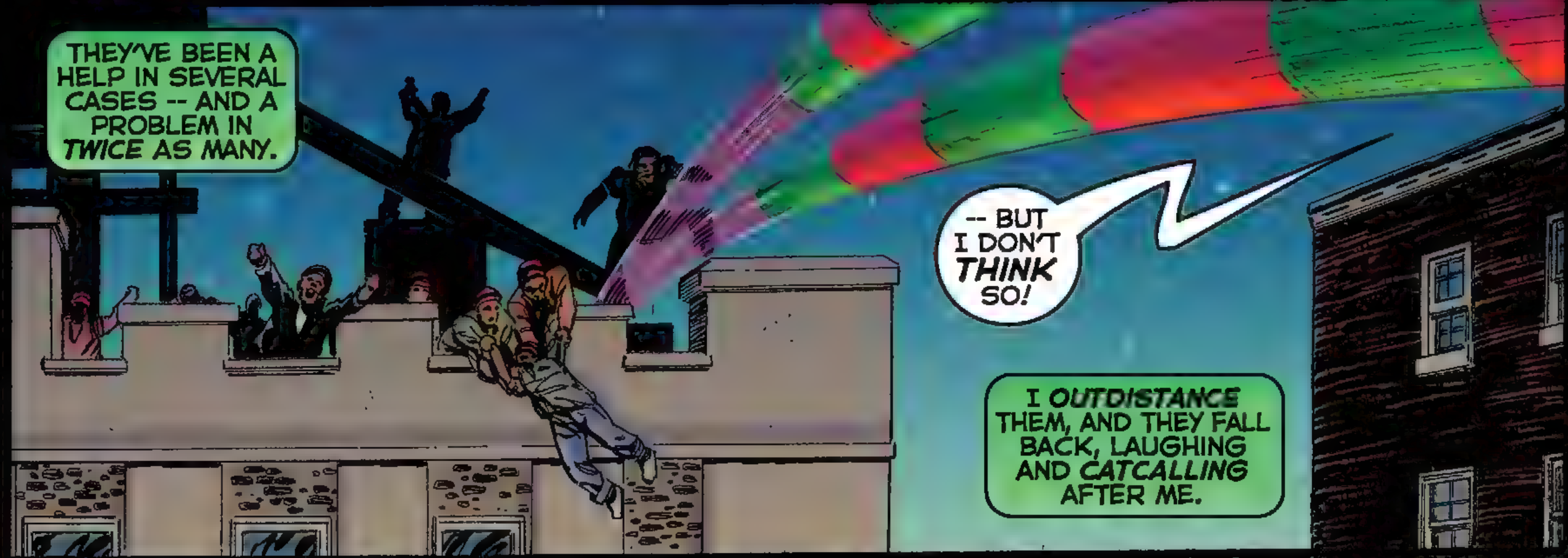
THEY AVERAGE ABOUT ONE *BROKEN* LEG A MONTH BETWEEN THEM, BUT SOME OF THEM JUST GET MORE AND MORE IMPRESSIVE.



I PROBABLY SHOULDN'T ENCOURAGE THEM, BUT THEY GOT UP TO WORSE THAN THIS BEFORE I EVER MET THEM.

YOU'RE GONNA BEAT ME? SORRY, FELLAS --

AND BETTER *THEIR* BRAND OF TROUBLE THAN WHAT THE OTHER BAKERVILLE GANGS PLAY AT.



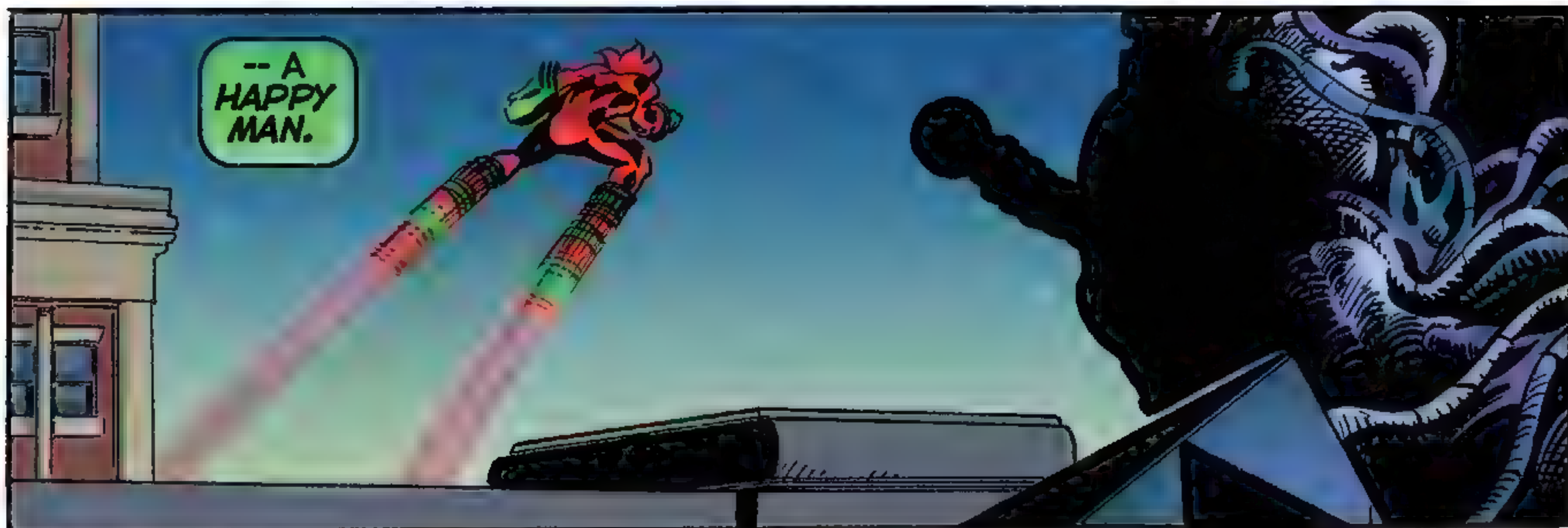
THEY'VE BEEN A HELP IN SEVERAL CASES -- AND A PROBLEM IN TWICE AS MANY.

-- BUT I DON'T THINK SO!

I OUTDISTANCE THEM, AND THEY FALL BACK, LAUGHING AND CATCALLING AFTER ME.

AND ON I GO,
VAULTING, LEAPING,
AND THE ROOFS
OF GAINESVILLE
COME INTO VIEW --

-- AND I'M
SMILING AGAIN,
AS BROADLY AS
MY MASK. I'M
A HAPPY MAN,
I GUESS --



-- A
HAPPY
MAN.

ONE QUICK CHANGE
IN THE ALLEY'S
SHADOWS, AND...

HOW'S
ASTRO CITY'S
HOTTEST NEWS
PERSONALITY?

ZACK!



YOU KNOW FULL WELL
I'M LIKE NUMBER FIVE
OR SOMETHING.

OH, I WASN'T
TALKING ABOUT
Q-RATINGS...

WELL,
THEN.



AND HOW
ARE THE ROBOT
DOGS COMING,
HM?

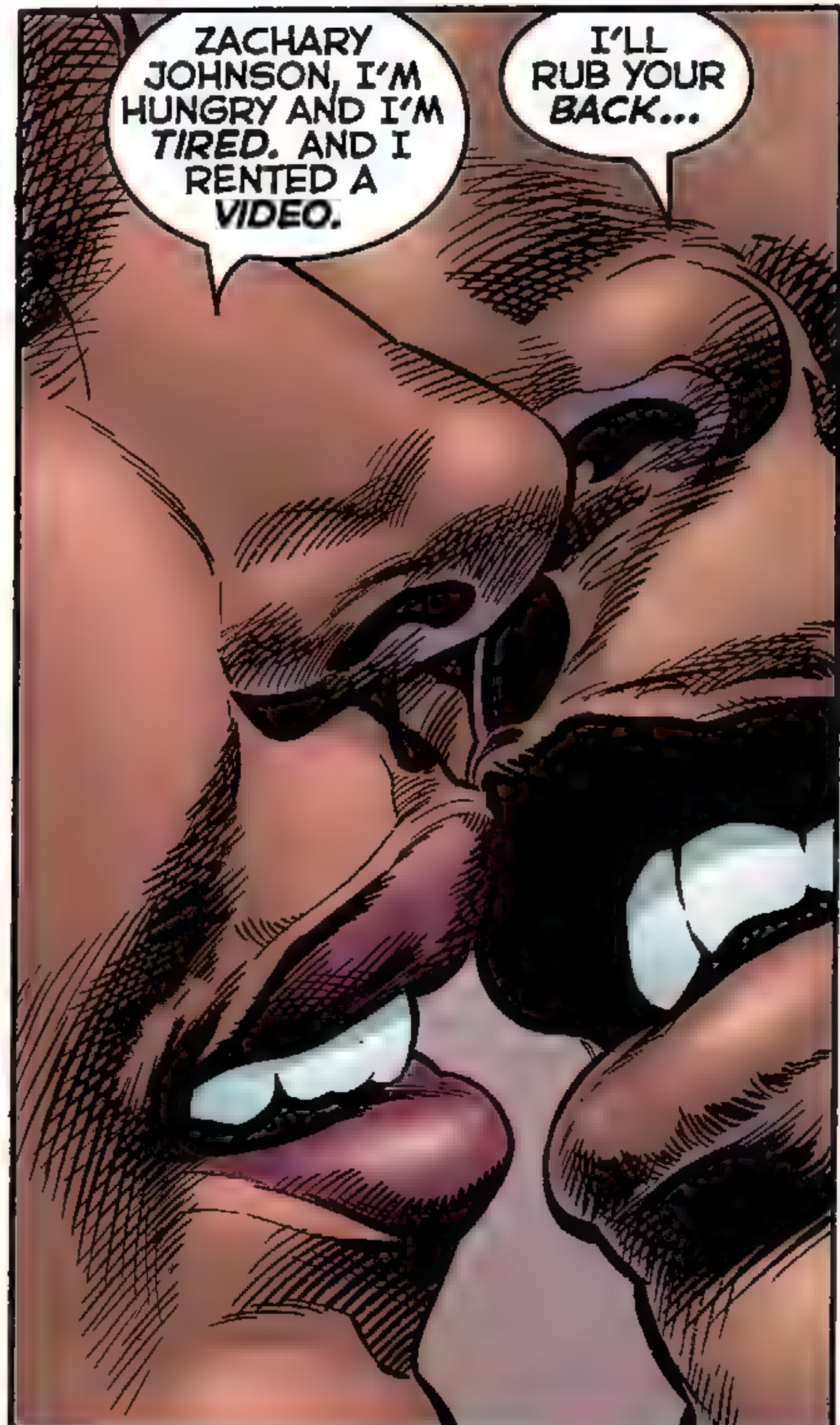
THAT'S
ROBODOGS.
AND I THINK THE
LAST GLITCH IS
SOLVED -- WE'LL BE
ABLE TO ROLL
'EM OUT AT
TOYFAIR.

BUT WHO
WANTS TO
TALK ABOUT
BUSINESS,
ANYWAY?



ZACHARY
JOHNSON, I'M
HUNGRY AND I'M
TIRED. AND I
RENTED A
VIDEO.

I'LL
RUB YOUR
BACK...





AFTER DINNER. WE CAN IGNORE THE MOVIE. BUT FIRST, I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO TELL YOU.

WHAT, THEY MADE YOU ANCHOR ALREADY?

NO, IT'S NOT WORK. IT'S SOMETHING MORE --

**BLAM
BLAM**



GUNSHOTS. FROM THE DIRECTION OF THE SWEATSHOP.

THAT'S MY BEEPER. KEEP A PLATE AND -- HECK, KEEP EVERYTHING WARM FOR ME, OKAY?



I'LL BE BACK AS QUICK AS I CAN.



COME BACK OKAY, ZACK. THIS TIME FOR SURE...

I DON'T LIKE TO LEAVE HER LIKE THAT, BUT I KNOW SHE'S OKAY WITH IT. SHE'S KNOWN WHO I AM FOR A LONG TIME. WHAT I DO.

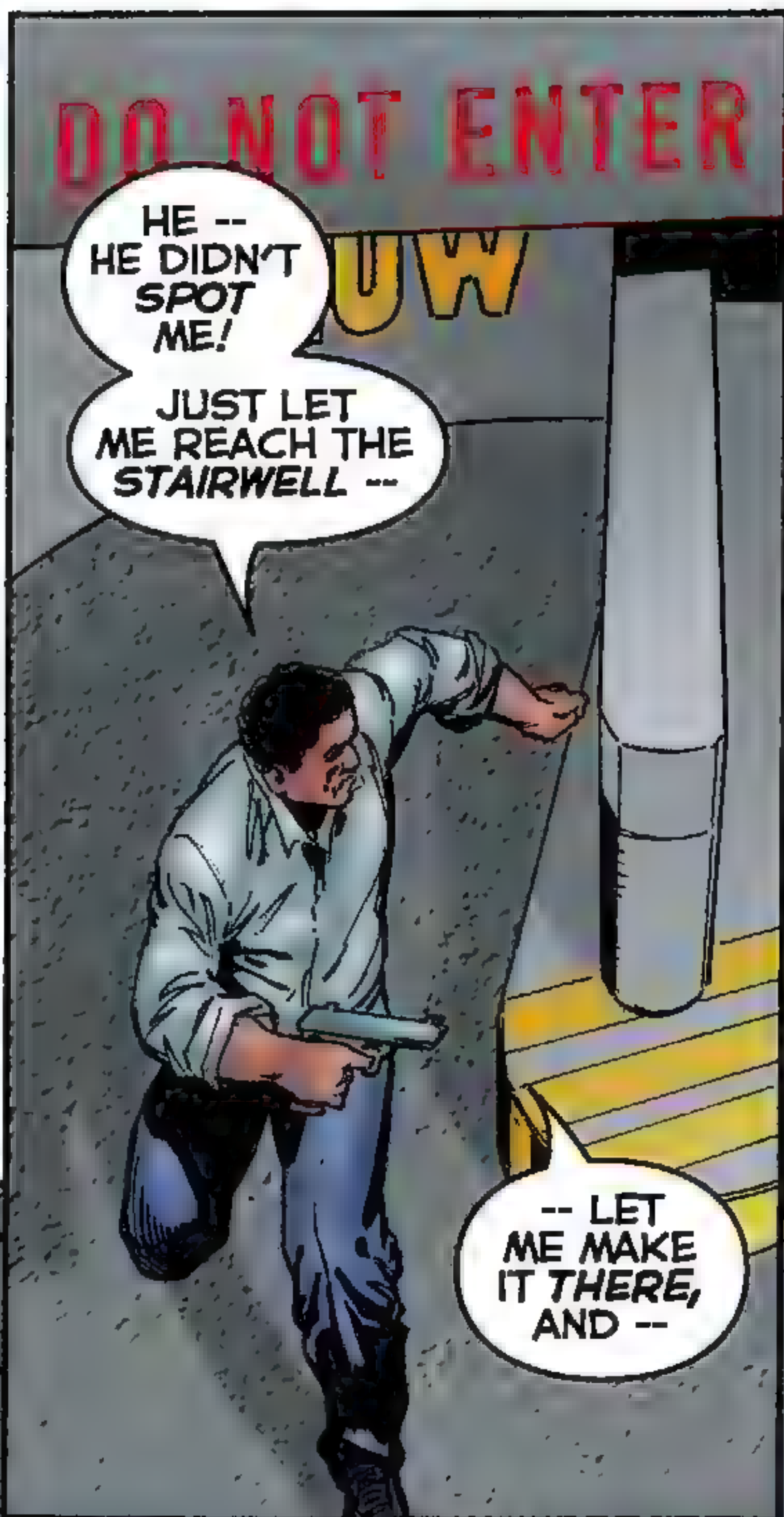
AND BESIDES, THERE'S SOMEONE OUT THERE, ON THE STREETS OF THE SWEATSHOP --

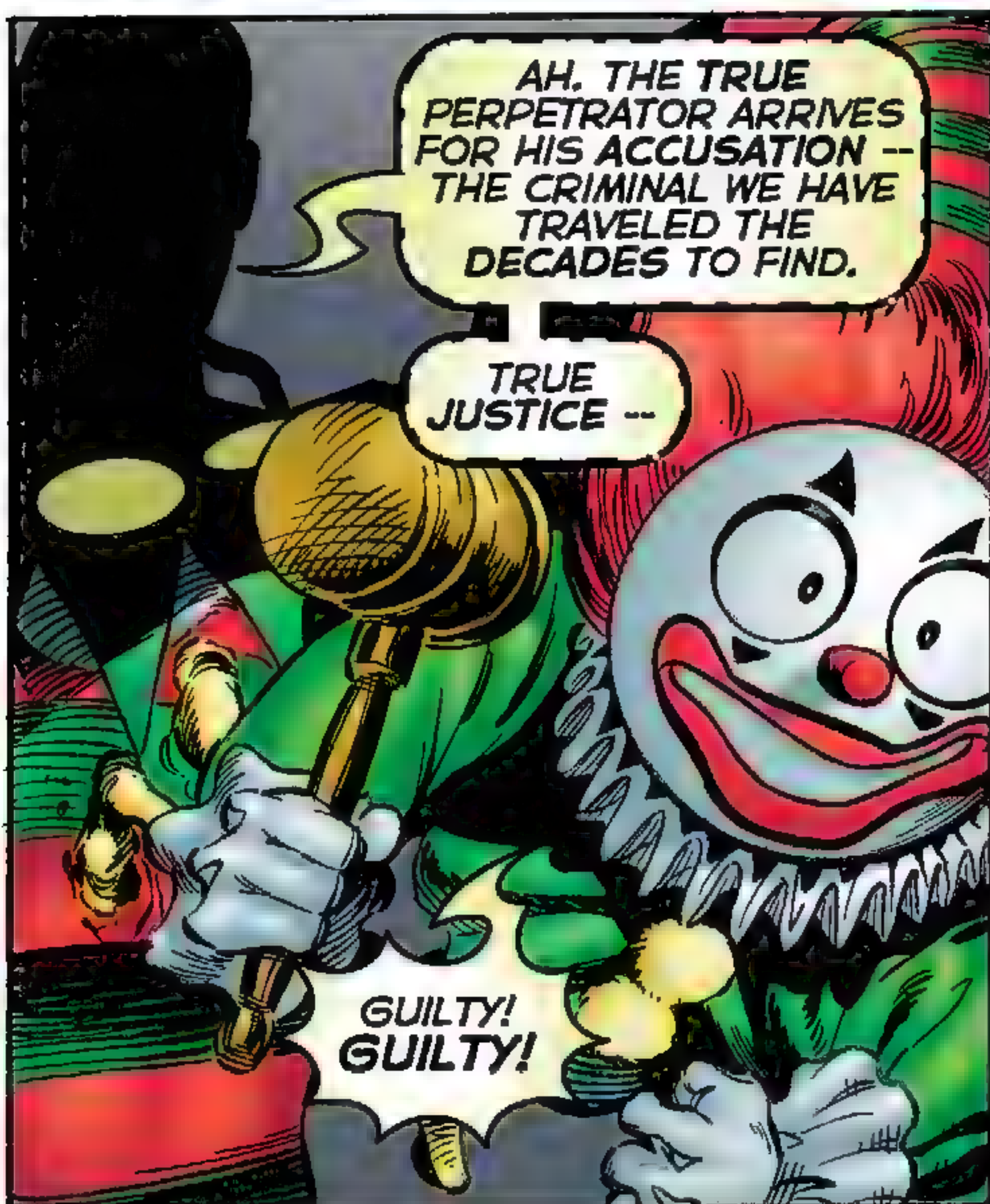
-- WHO NEEDS MY HELP.

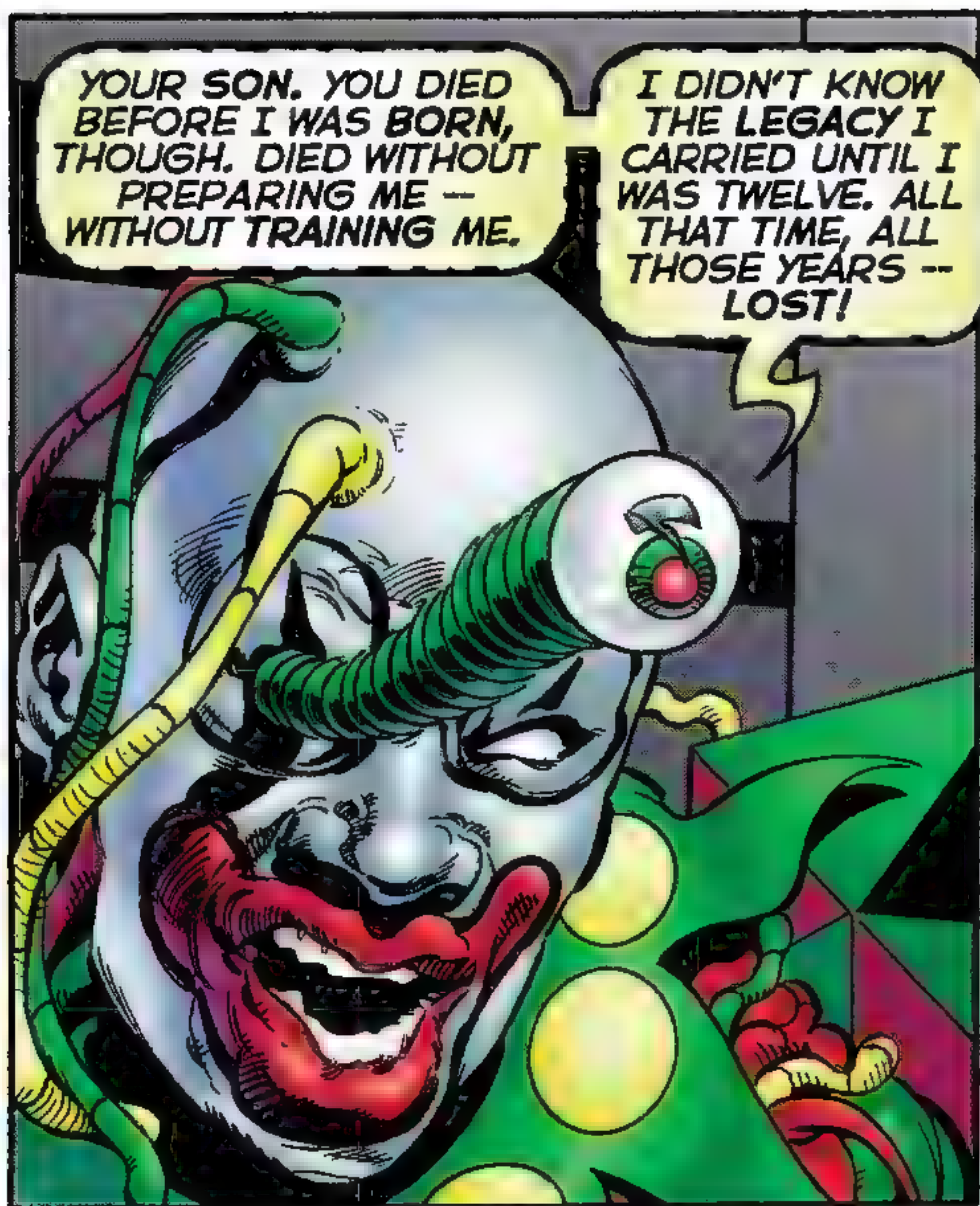
**BLAM
BLAM
BLAM**

NO!
NO -- STAY BACK!



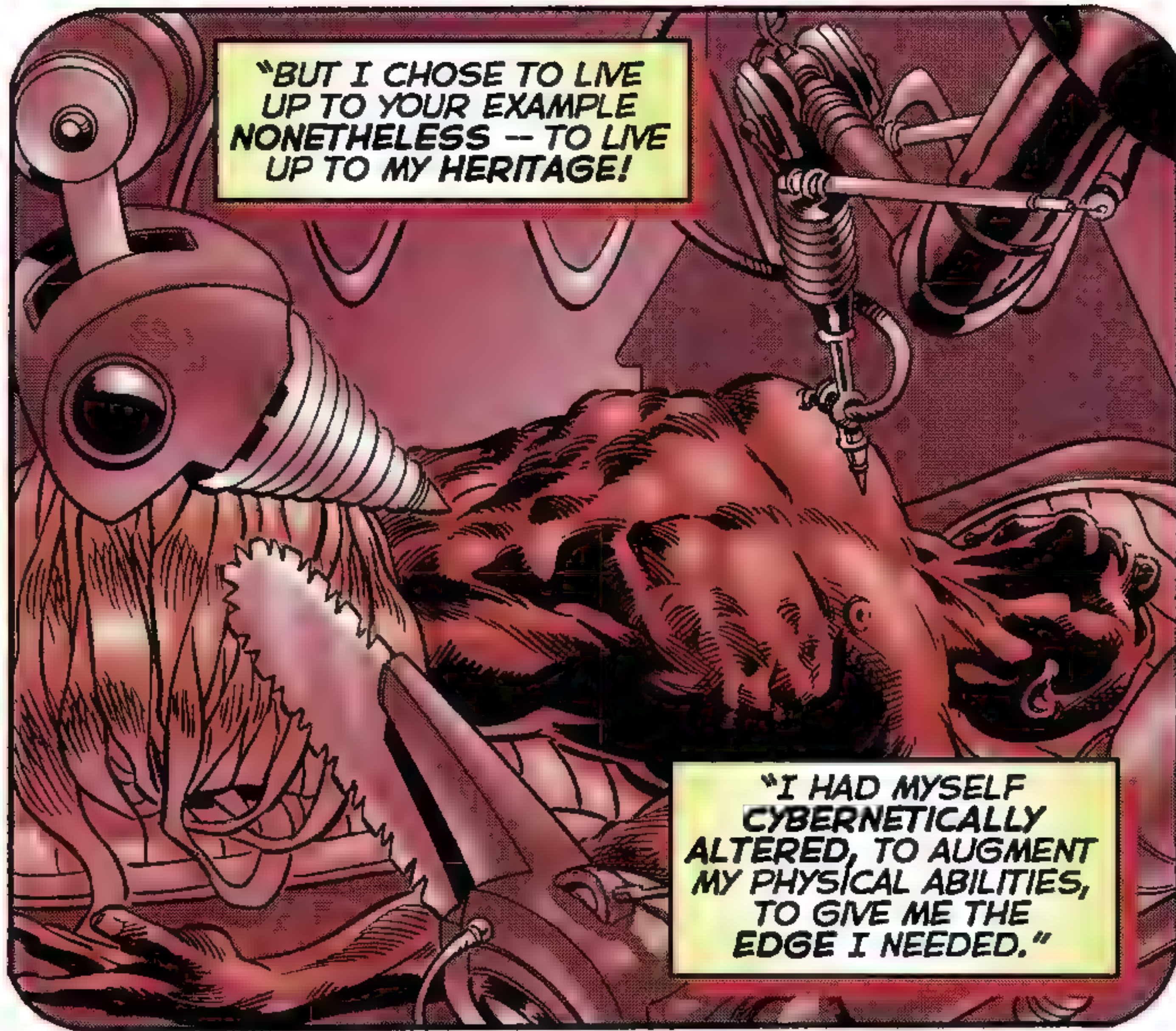






YOUR SON. YOU DIED BEFORE I WAS BORN, THOUGH. DIED WITHOUT PREPARING ME -- WITHOUT TRAINING ME.

I DIDN'T KNOW THE LEGACY I CARRIED UNTIL I WAS TWELVE. ALL THAT TIME, ALL THOSE YEARS -- LOST!

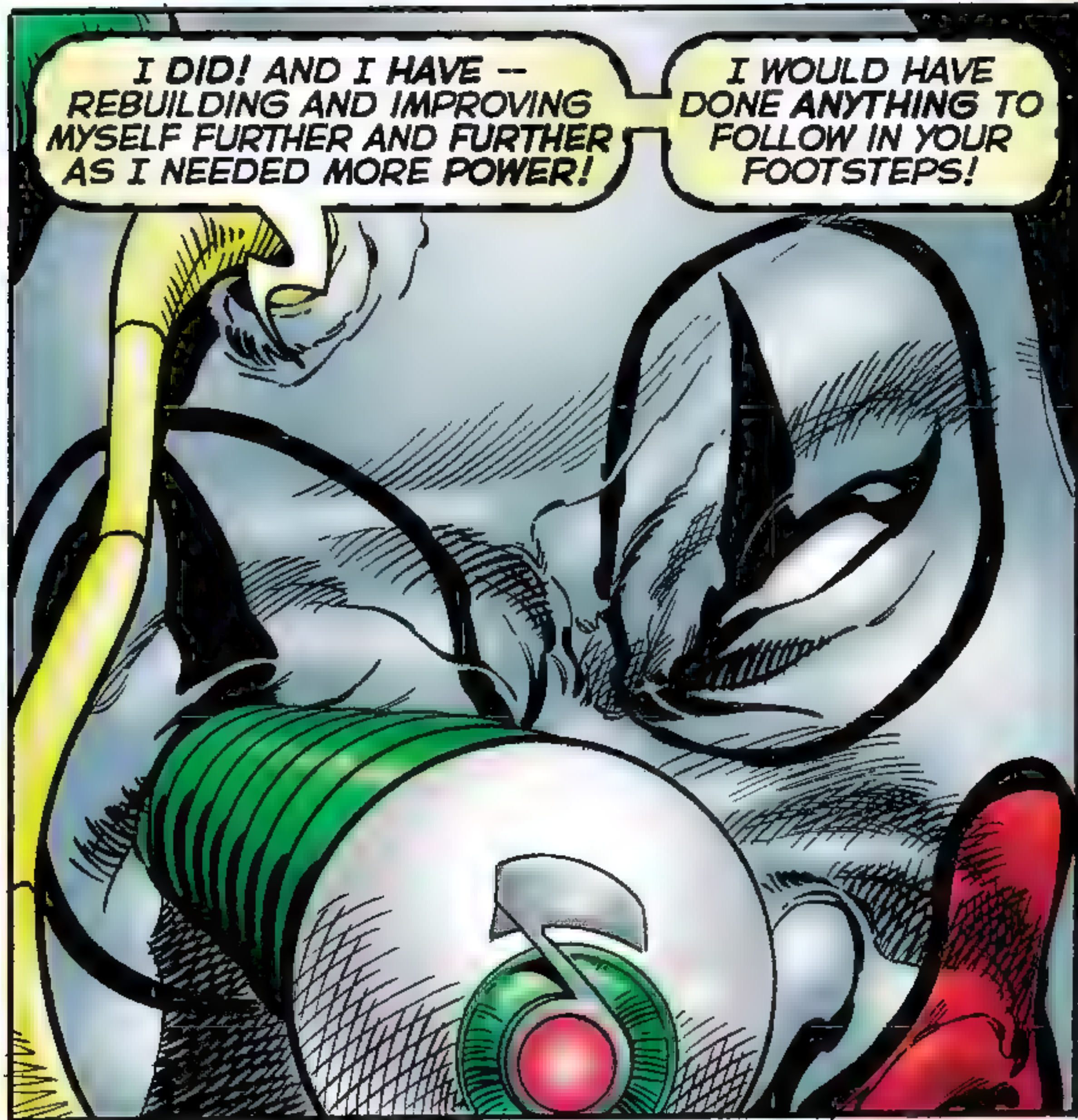


"BUT I CHOSE TO LIVE UP TO YOUR EXAMPLE NONETHELESS -- TO LIVE UP TO MY HERITAGE!

"I HAD MYSELF CYBERNETICALLY ALTERED, TO AUGMENT MY PHYSICAL ABILITIES, TO GIVE ME THE EDGE I NEEDED."



YOU -- MUTILATED YOURSELF?



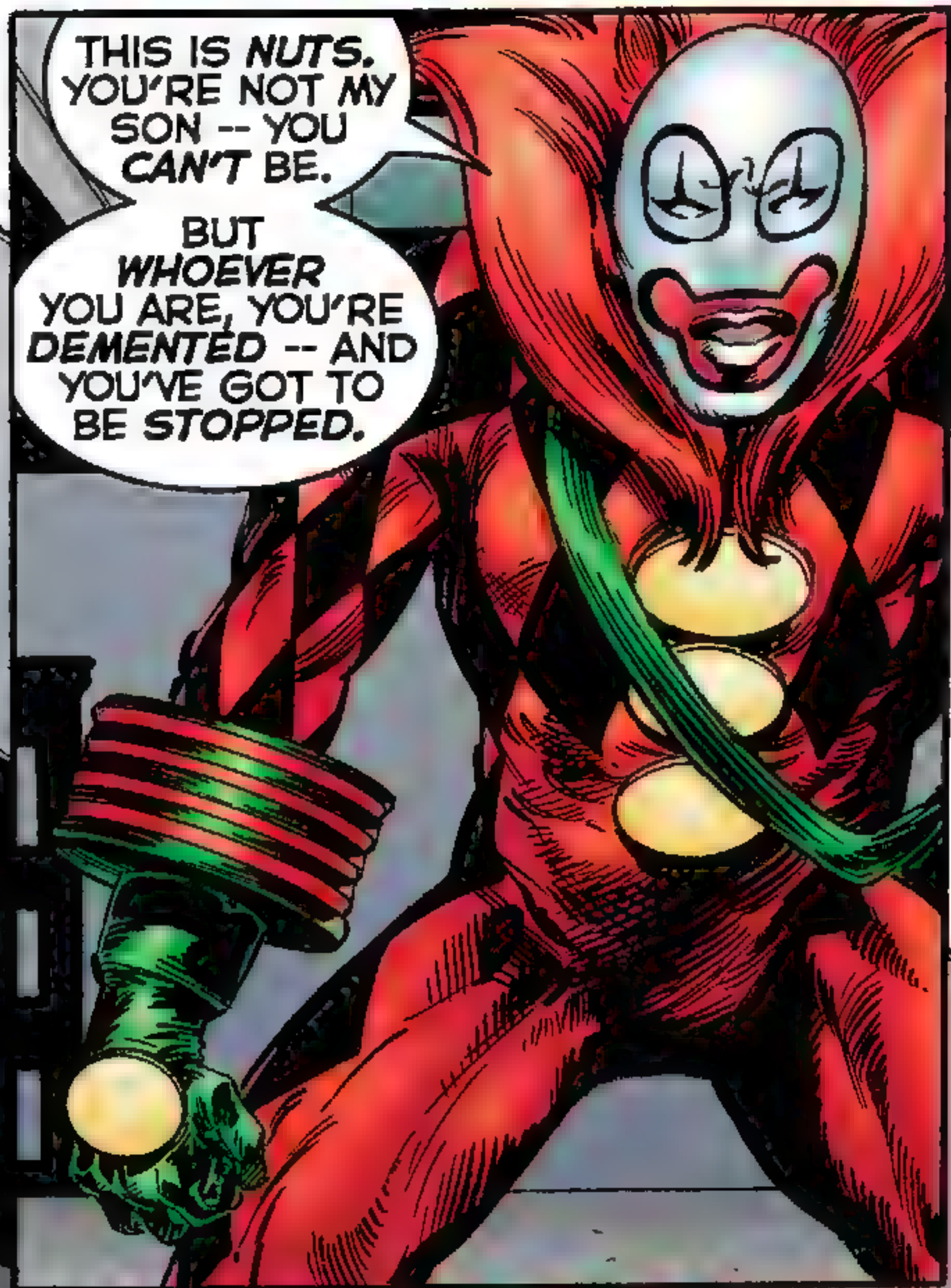
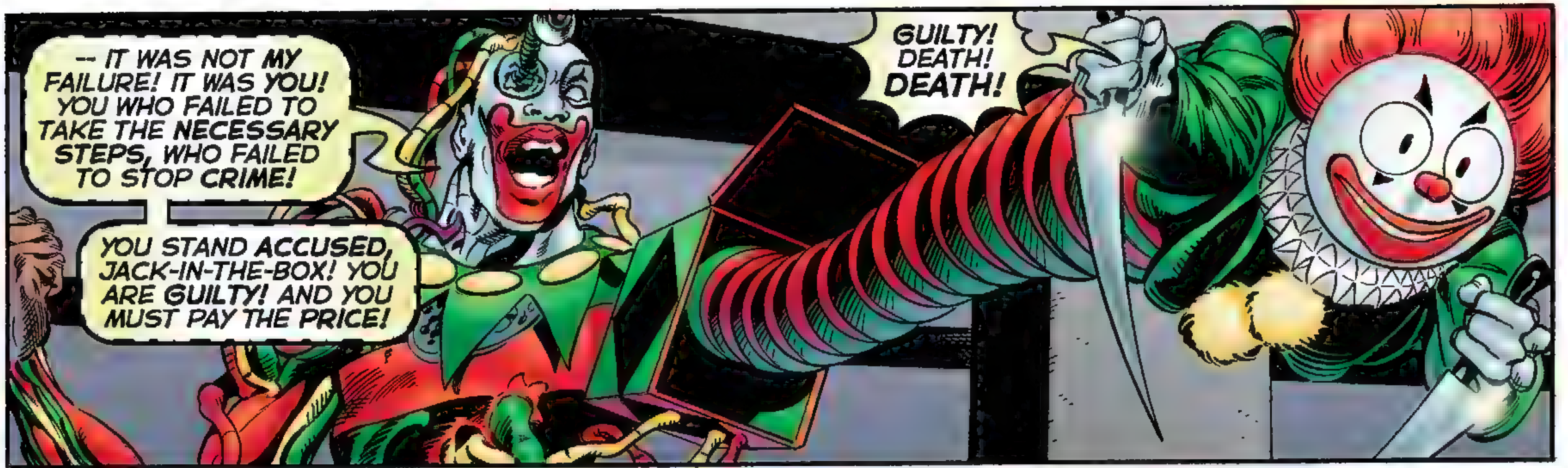
I DID! AND I HAVE -- REBUILDING AND IMPROVING MYSELF FURTHER AND FURTHER AS I NEEDED MORE POWER!

I WOULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING TO FOLLOW IN YOUR FOOTSTEPS!



"I MADE MYSELF COLD. I MADE MYSELF HARD, AND BRUTAL -- JUDGE AND JURY IN THE WAR AGAINST CRIME!

"BUT IT WAS NOT ENOUGH! I WAS OVERWHELMED -- CRIME COULD NOT BE STEMMED, AND THEN I REALIZED --





AH-AH,
LITTLE ROBOT-
MAN! LITTLE
MACHINE, LITTLE
FAILURE!

I HAVE
REACHED THIS
ERA -- IN TIME!
YOU WILL NOT
DEFILE THE JACK
WITH YOUR
TOUCH!

AN
ACCOMPLICE!
AIDING AND
ABETTING!

ANOTHER ONE?
I FEEL LIKE I'VE
WALKED INTO A MOVIE
LATE -- A DAVID
LYNCH MOVIE,
SOMETHING I DON'T
WANT TO SEE --

IN FACT,
FOR EVEN
ATTEMPTING
IT --

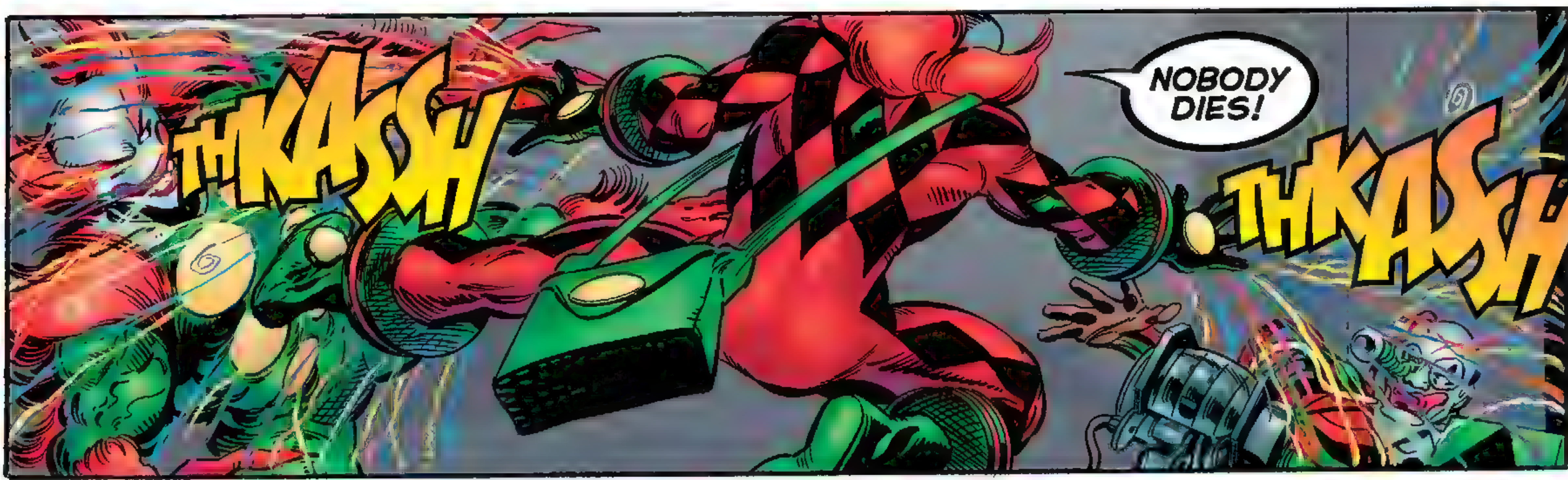
GUILTY!
GUILTY!



BUT WHATEVER'S
GOING ON, I CAN
AT LEAST PREVENT
ANY MORE LIVES
FROM BEING LOST.

-- YOU
MUST PAY
THE PRICE!

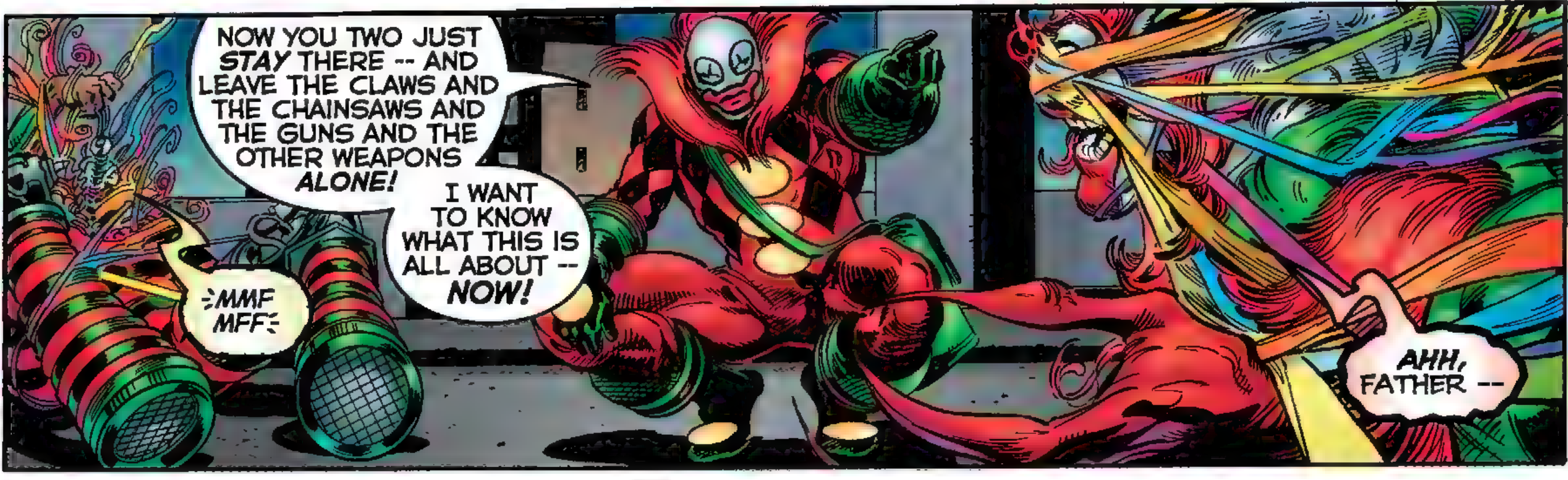
NO!



NOBODY
DIES!

THKASHH

THKASHH



NOW YOU TWO JUST
STAY THERE -- AND
LEAVE THE CLAWS AND
THE CHAINSAWS AND
THE GUNS AND THE
OTHER WEAPONS
ALONE!

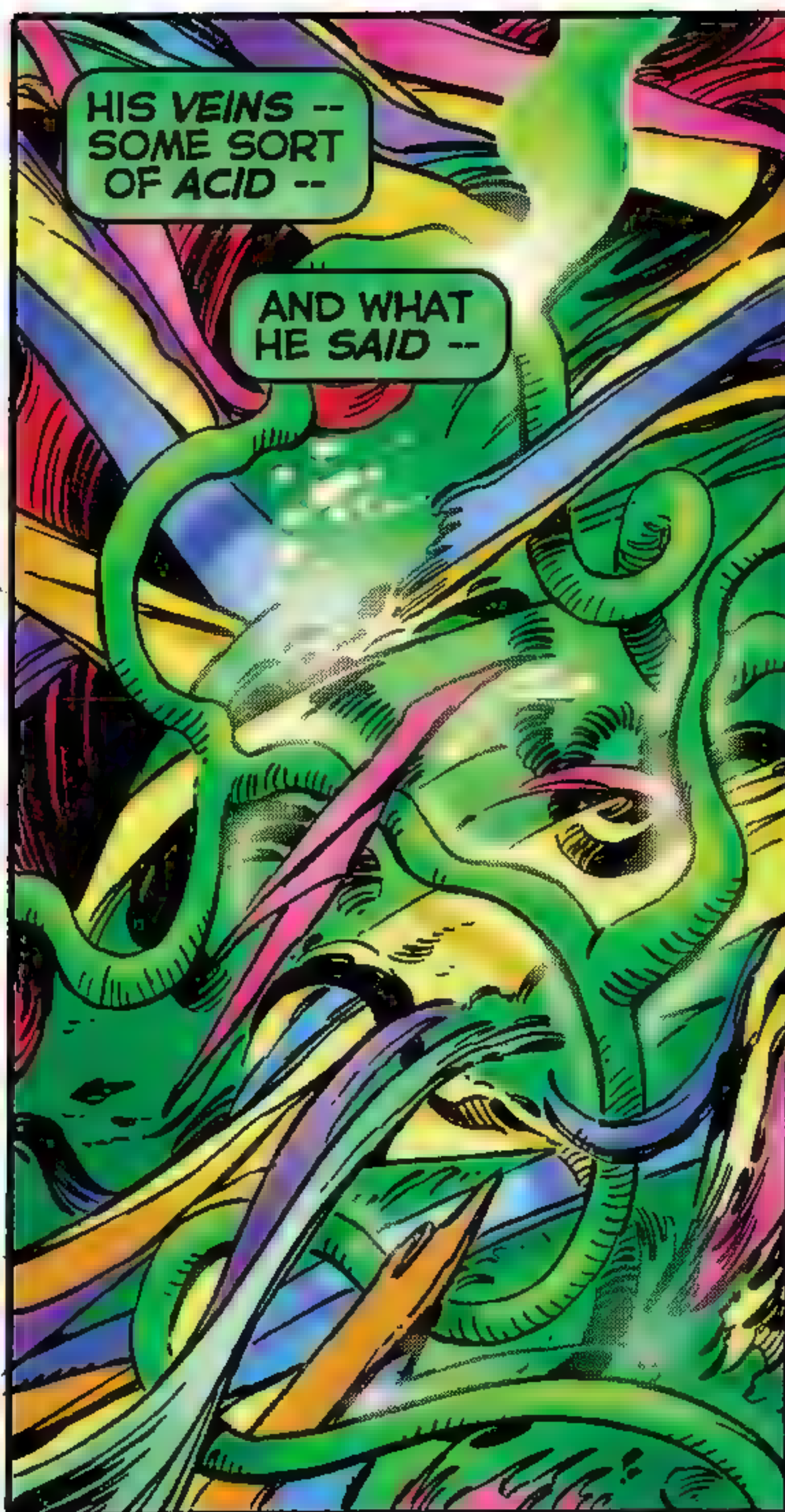
I WANT
TO KNOW
WHAT THIS IS
ALL ABOUT --
NOW!

MFF
MFF

AHH,
FATHER --



-- ARE YOU STILL USING THIS PRIMITIVE MULTI-CHAIN THERMOPLASTIC-RESIN CONFETTI? IT'S SO EASY TO MELT...



HIS VEINS -- SOME SORT OF ACID --

AND WHAT HE SAID --



MY STOMACH CHURNS, AND MY THROAT TIGHTENS UP, AND I FIND MYSELF SAYING IT AGAIN --

WHO ARE YOU?



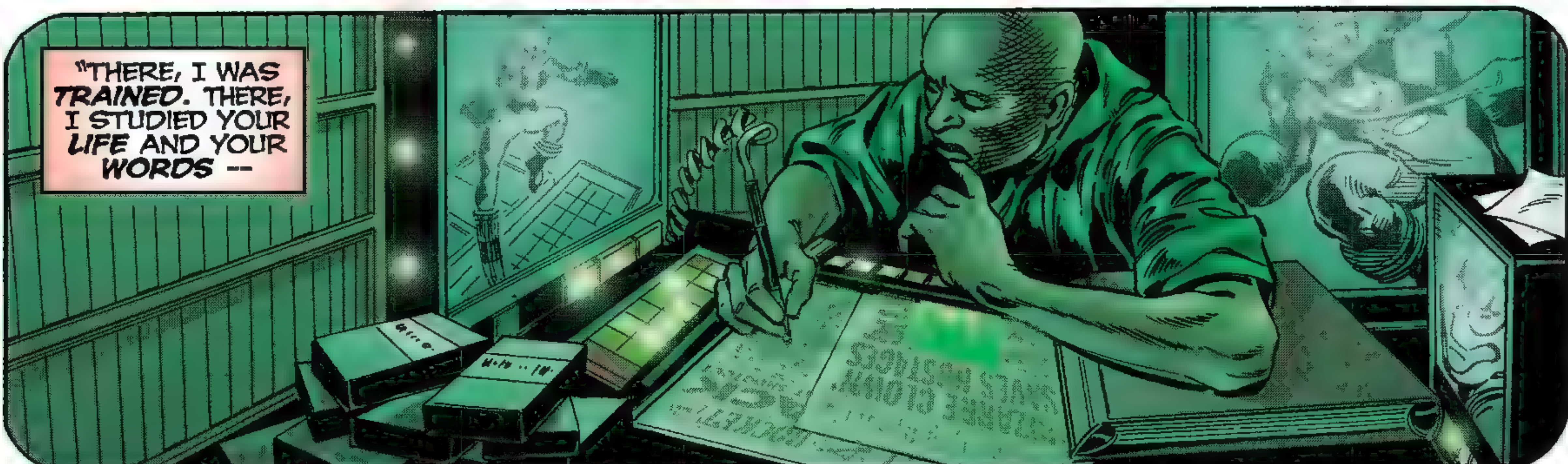
LIKE *THIS* PATHETIC, CLUMSY CREATURE, SIR, I AM YOUR SON. I AM THE JACKSON.

BUT A BETTER, MORE RESPECTFUL SON -- AS I AM SURE YOU SEE. FOR I DID NOT MATURE IN A VACUUM.

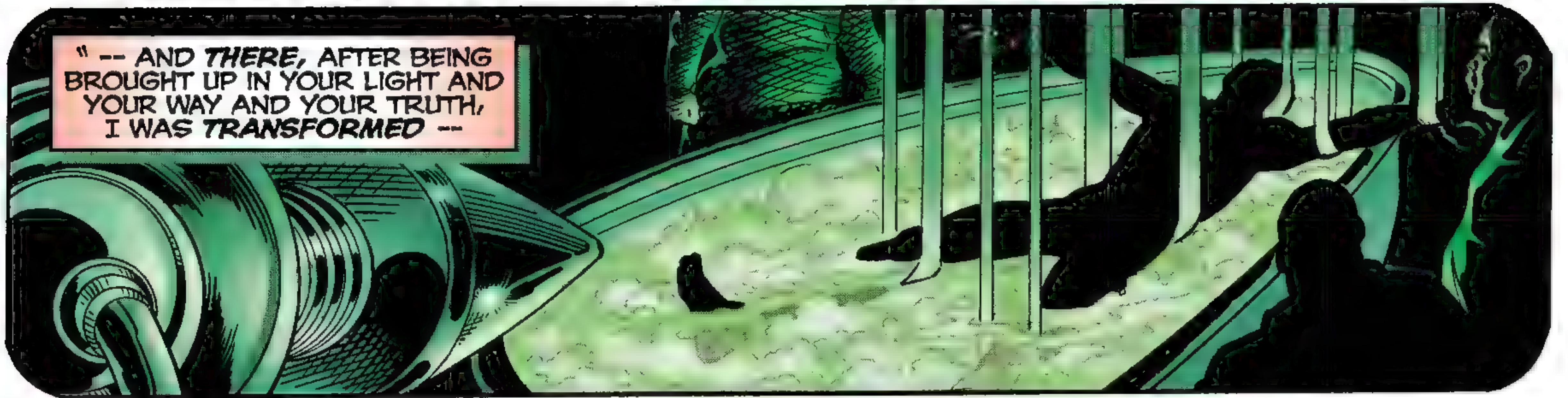


"AFTER YOU FELL IN BATTLE, I WAS TAKEN -- BY THE BROTHERS OF TROUBLE.

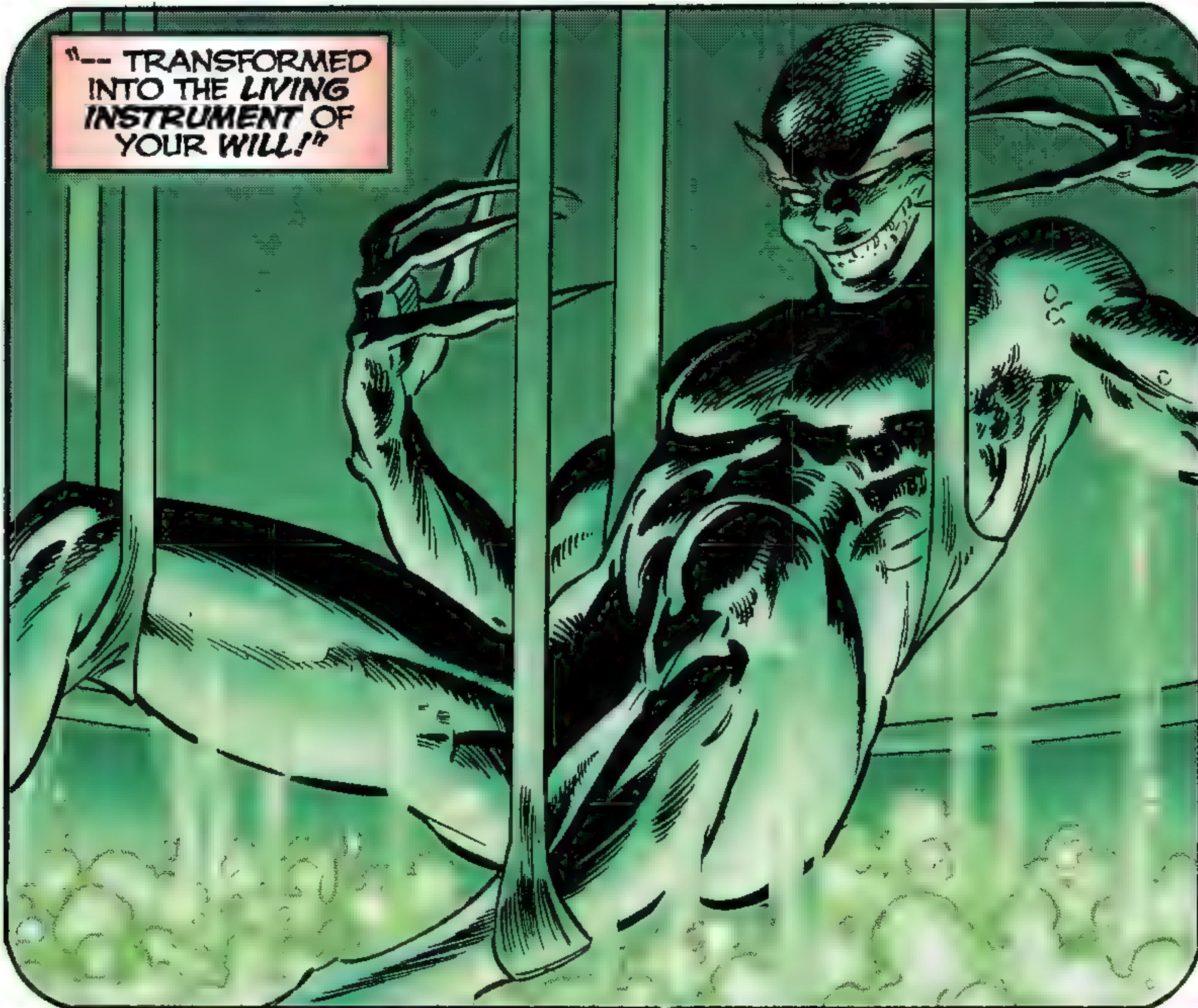
"TAKEN TO THE FAR FUTURE, TO ESCAPE THE WASTING.



"THERE, I WAS TRAINED. THERE, I STUDIED YOUR LIFE AND YOUR WORDS --



"-- AND *THERE*, AFTER BEING
BROUGHT UP IN YOUR LIGHT AND
YOUR WAY AND YOUR TRUTH,
I WAS TRANSFORMED --"

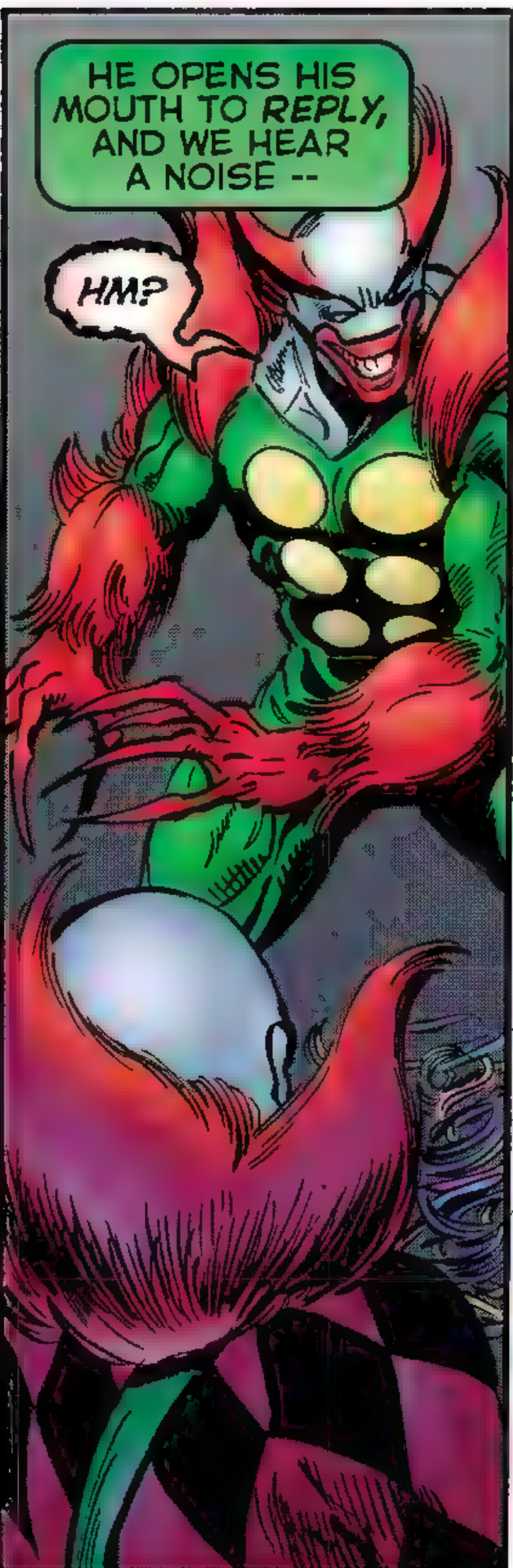


"-- TRANSFORMED
INTO THE *LIVING*
INSTRUMENT OF
YOUR WILL!"



YOU DID THIS --
YOU LET THIS BE
DONE TO YOU --
AS SOME ATTEMPT
TO HONOR ME?
TO BE LIKE
ME?

IT HAS TO BE A TRICK,
I FIND MYSELF THINKING --
AN ILLUSION. IT'S SMOKE
& MIRRORS, OUT OF JAIL,
OR PROSPERO, OR -- OR --



HE OPENS HIS
MOUTH TO REPLY,
AND WE HEAR
A NOISE --

HM?



HEH-HEH!
CONTEMPT!
CONTEMPT OF
THE BOX!

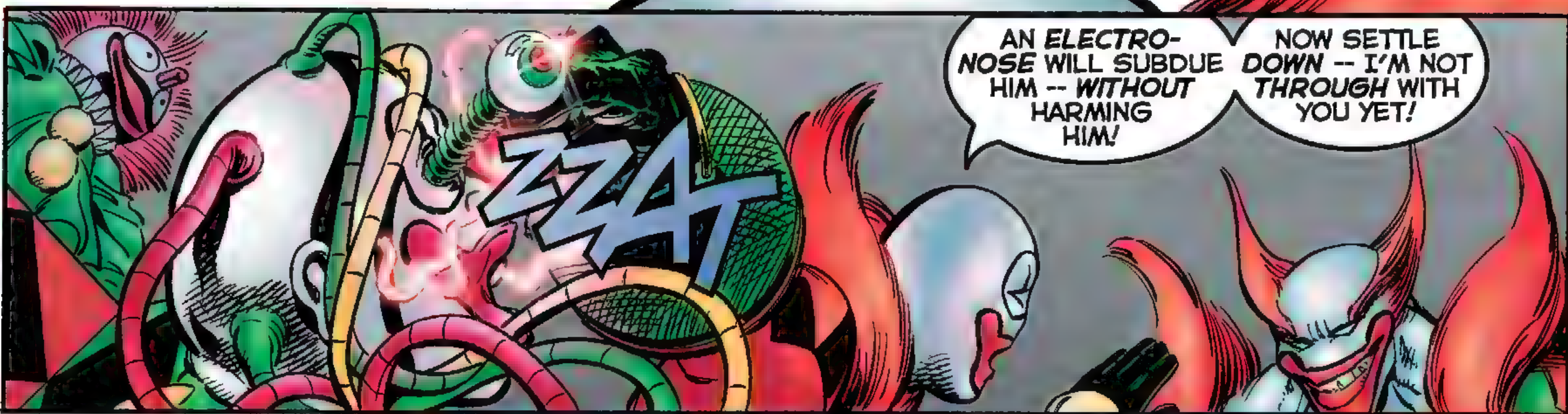
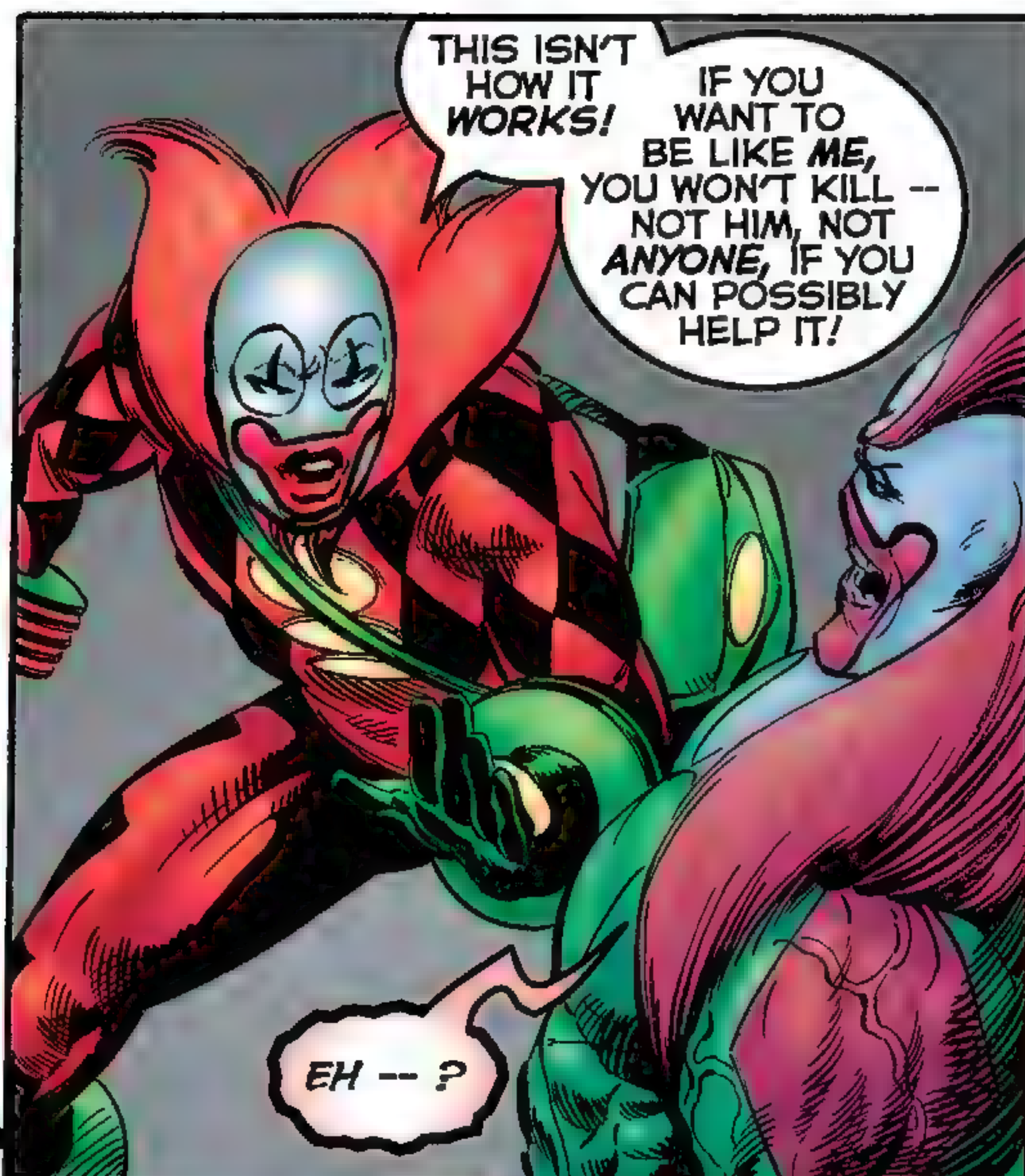
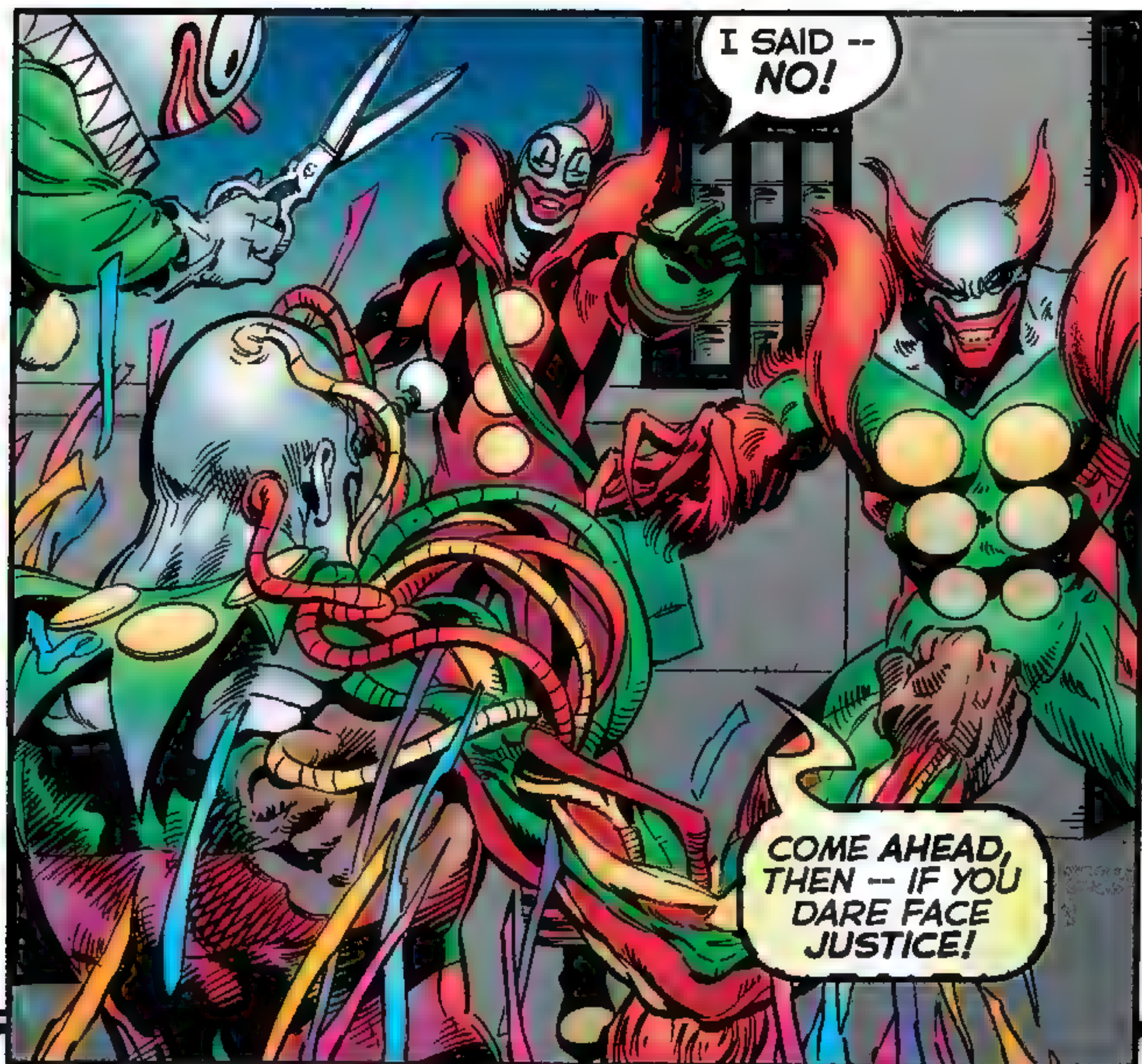
MAXIMUM
PENALTY!

SNIP
SNIP
SNIP



THAT
HERETIC HAS
NO *RIGHT* TO
SULLY THIS
MOMENT!

I'LL
KILL
HIM -- !





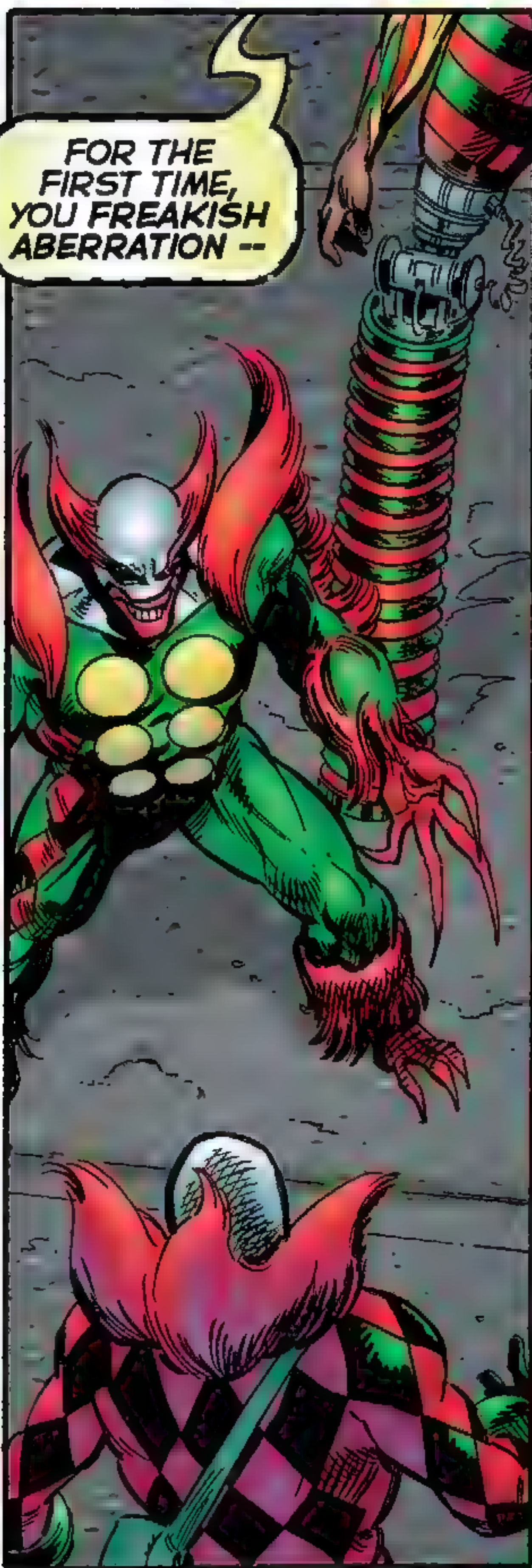
YOU -- YOU CAN'T BASE A RELIGION ON OFF-THE-CUFF JOKES... CAN YOU?

YOU... FORSWEAR YOUR OWN WORDS?

YOU SPIT ON THE VERY BUILDING BLOCKS OF MY CREED? YOU CALL THE SACRED WORDS A JOKE?!

YOU ARE NOT THE JACK -- AND I SHOULD NOT HAVE SAVED YOU! YOU ARE AN IMPOSTER, A TRAVESTY, A LIE! AND FOR YOUR CALUMNY --

-- YOU MUST DIE!



FOR THE FIRST TIME, YOU FREAKISH ABERRATION --

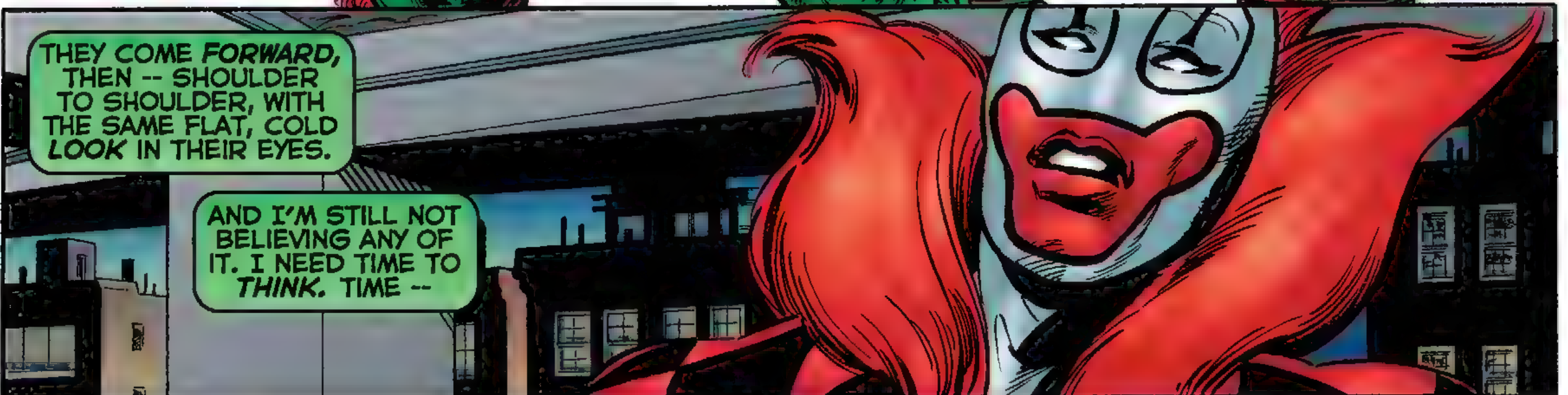
-- YOU SAY SOMETHING I CAN AGREE WITH. WE WILL JOIN FORCES, THEN -- UNTIL OUR PROGENITOR HAS PAID FOR HIS CRIMES.

THEN WE CAN SETTLE OUR OWN DIFFERENCES.



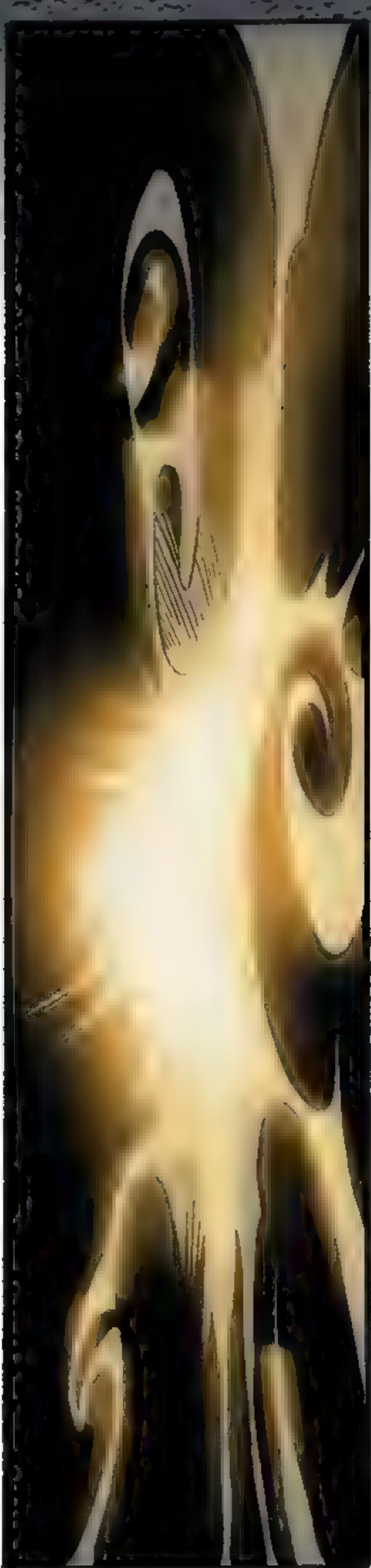
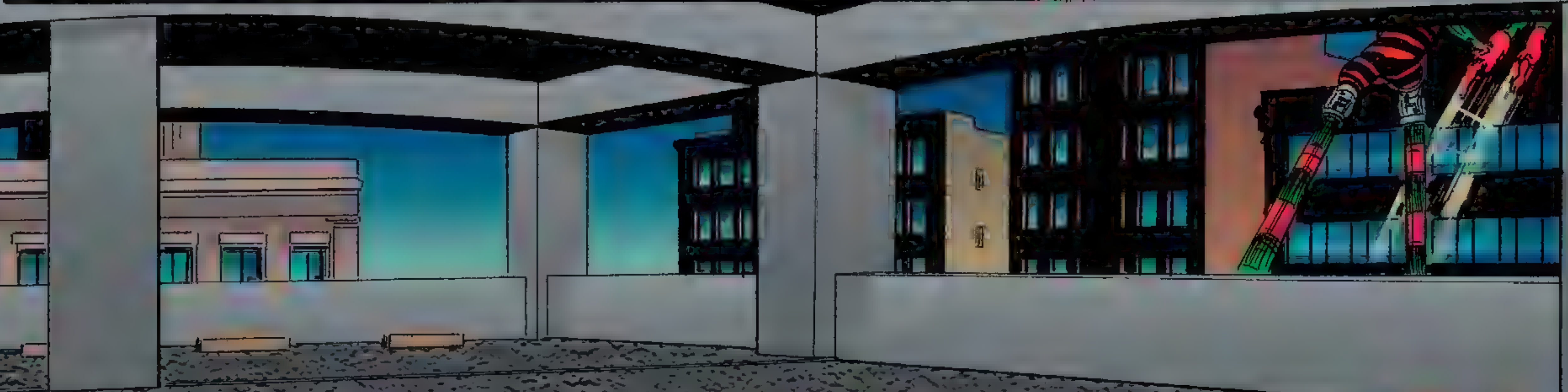
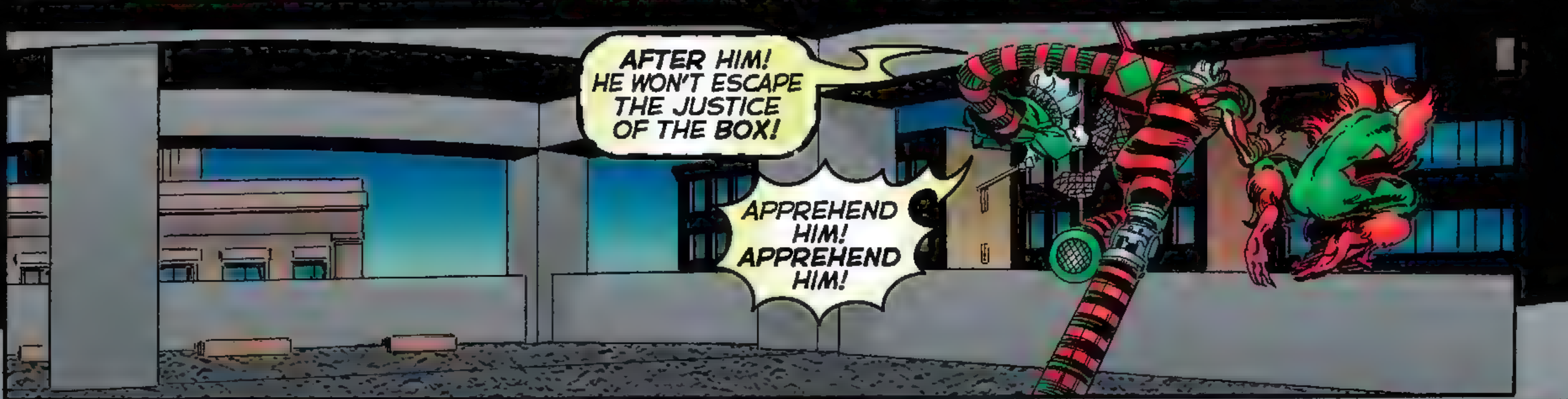
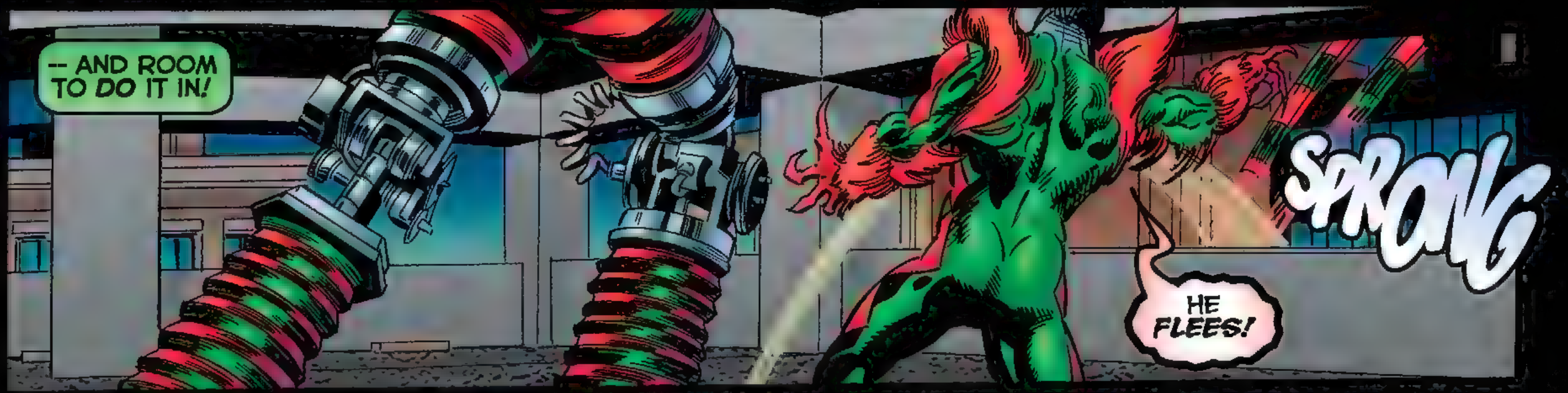
DEPUTIZED! DEPUTIZED!

AND AS A POINT OF PROCEDURE, FATHER DEAR, DON'T ATTEMPT TO ELECTROCUTE CYBORGS. IT ONLY BOOSTS THEIR POWER.



THEY COME FORWARD, THEN -- SHOULDER TO SHOULDER, WITH THE SAME FLAT, COLD LOOK IN THEIR EYES.

AND I'M STILL NOT BELIEVING ANY OF IT. I NEED TIME TO THINK. TIME --

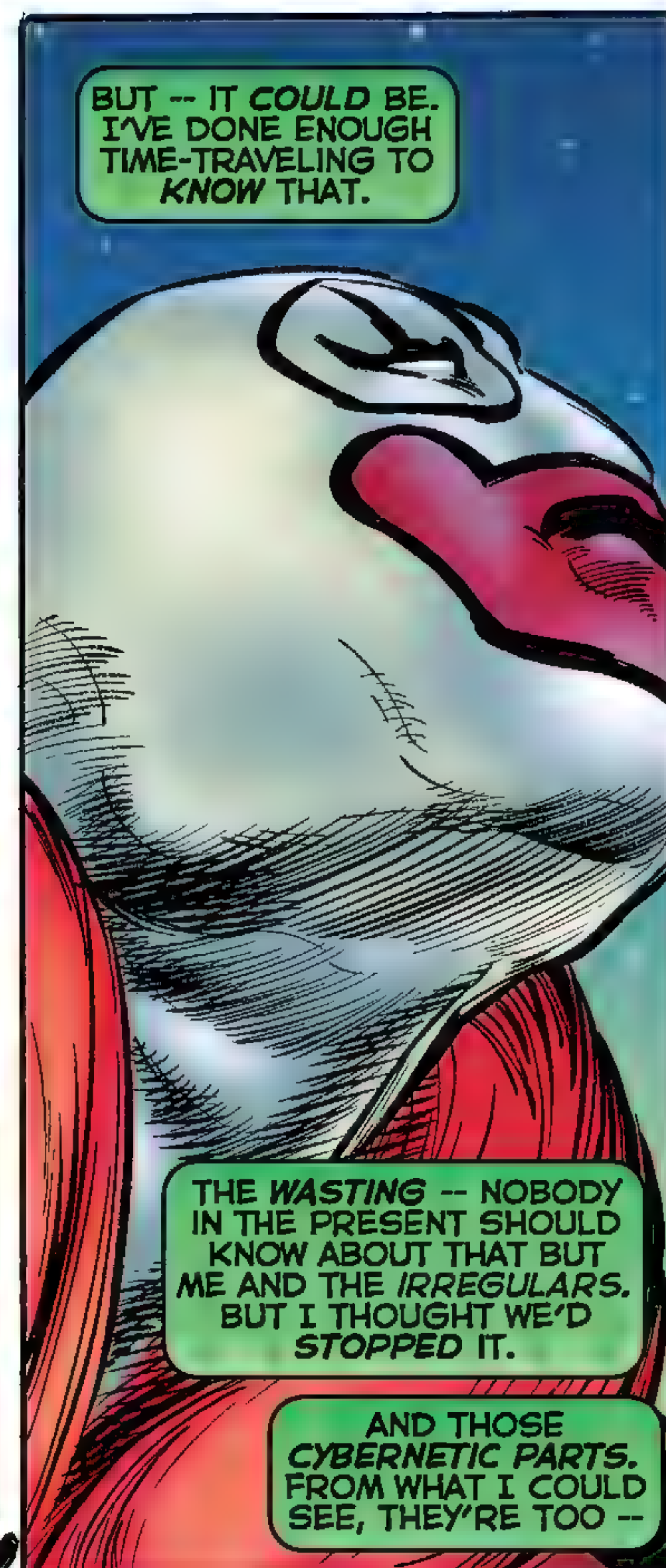




I GULP IN THE COOL NIGHT AIR, TRYING TO CLEAR MY HEAD, BUT EVEN SO, I'M SHAKING. HOW LONG AGO DID I SAY I WAS A HAPPY MAN?

THIS CAN'T BE TRUE. I'VE ALWAYS TRIED TO HELP -- TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, AND IF THESE ARE MY SONS --

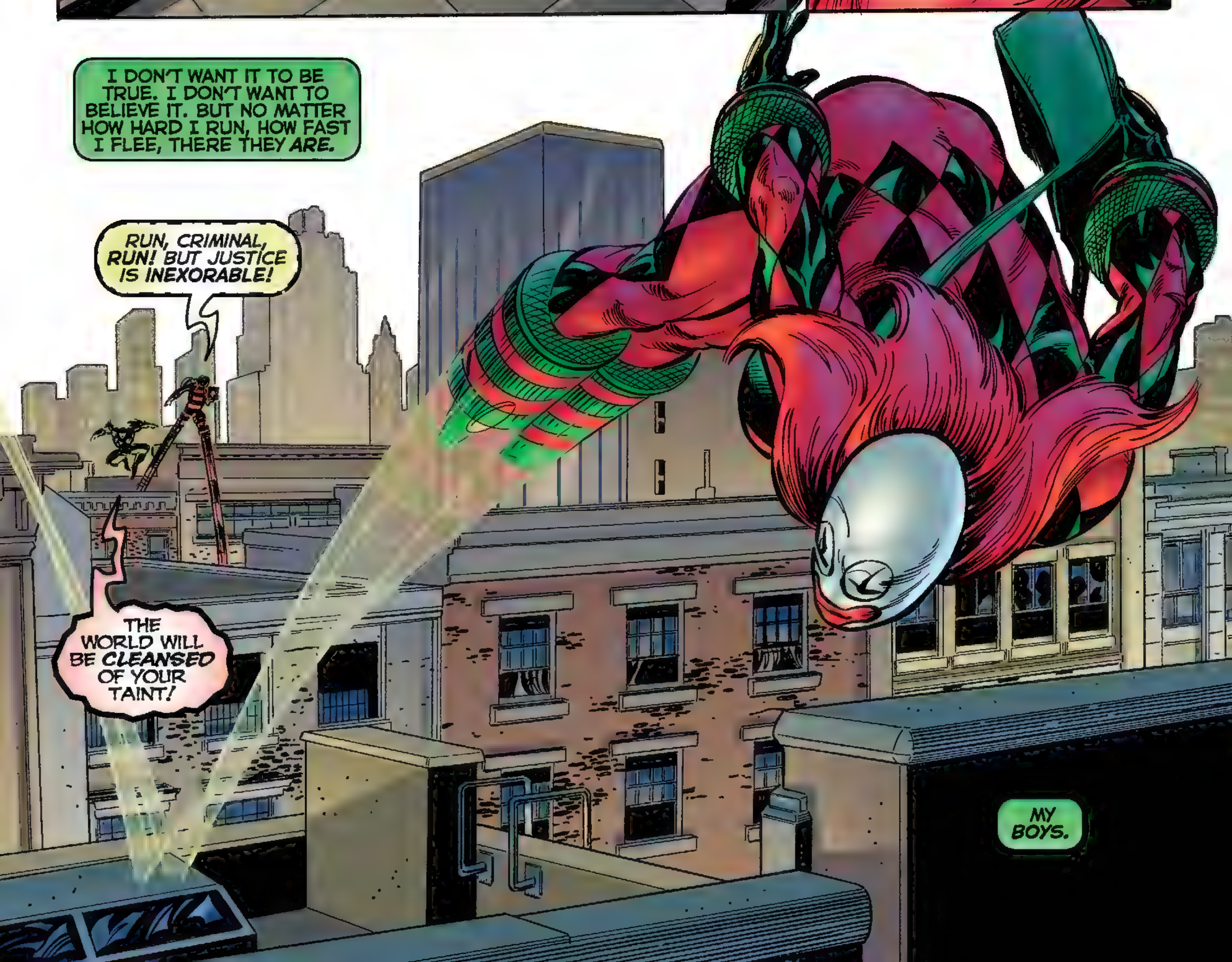
IT CAN'T BE TRUE.



BUT -- IT COULD BE. I'VE DONE ENOUGH TIME-TRAVELING TO KNOW THAT.

THE WASTING -- NOBODY IN THE PRESENT SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THAT BUT ME AND THE IRREGULARS. BUT I THOUGHT WE'D STOPPED IT.

AND THOSE CYBERNETIC PARTS. FROM WHAT I COULD SEE, THEY'RE TOO --



I DON'T WANT IT TO BE TRUE. I DON'T WANT TO BELIEVE IT. BUT NO MATTER HOW HARD I RUN, HOW FAST I FLEE, THERE THEY ARE.

RUN, CRIMINAL, RUN! BUT JUSTICE IS INEXORABLE!

THE WORLD WILL BE CLEANSED OF YOUR TAIN!

MY BOYS.

BUT EVEN AS I TRY TO REJECT
WHAT THEY'VE SAID, I'M THINKING
LIKE THE ENGINEER I AM --

-- THINKING
ABOUT WHAT I
KNOW OF THEM,
ABOUT WHAT
POSSIBILITIES
PRESENT
THEMSELVES --

I WISH I COULD
GET SOME DISTANCE,
TO GIVE ME TIME TO
ACT, BUT THEY'RE
TOO FAST.

THEY'RE NEVER
MORE THAN A FEW
BLOCKS BACK.

IT CAN'T BE HELPED.
I'VE GOT TO DO THE
BEST I CAN.

WHATEVER THEY
ARE, WHEREVER
THEY'RE FROM, I
CAN THINK ABOUT IT
LATER. RIGHT NOW,
I'VE GOT TO STOP
THEM, AND I'VE GOT
AN IDEA HOW --

EVERYTHING I
NEED IS HERE --
BUT THEY'LL BE
HERE TOO, ANY
SECOND. THERE'S
NO TIME TO --

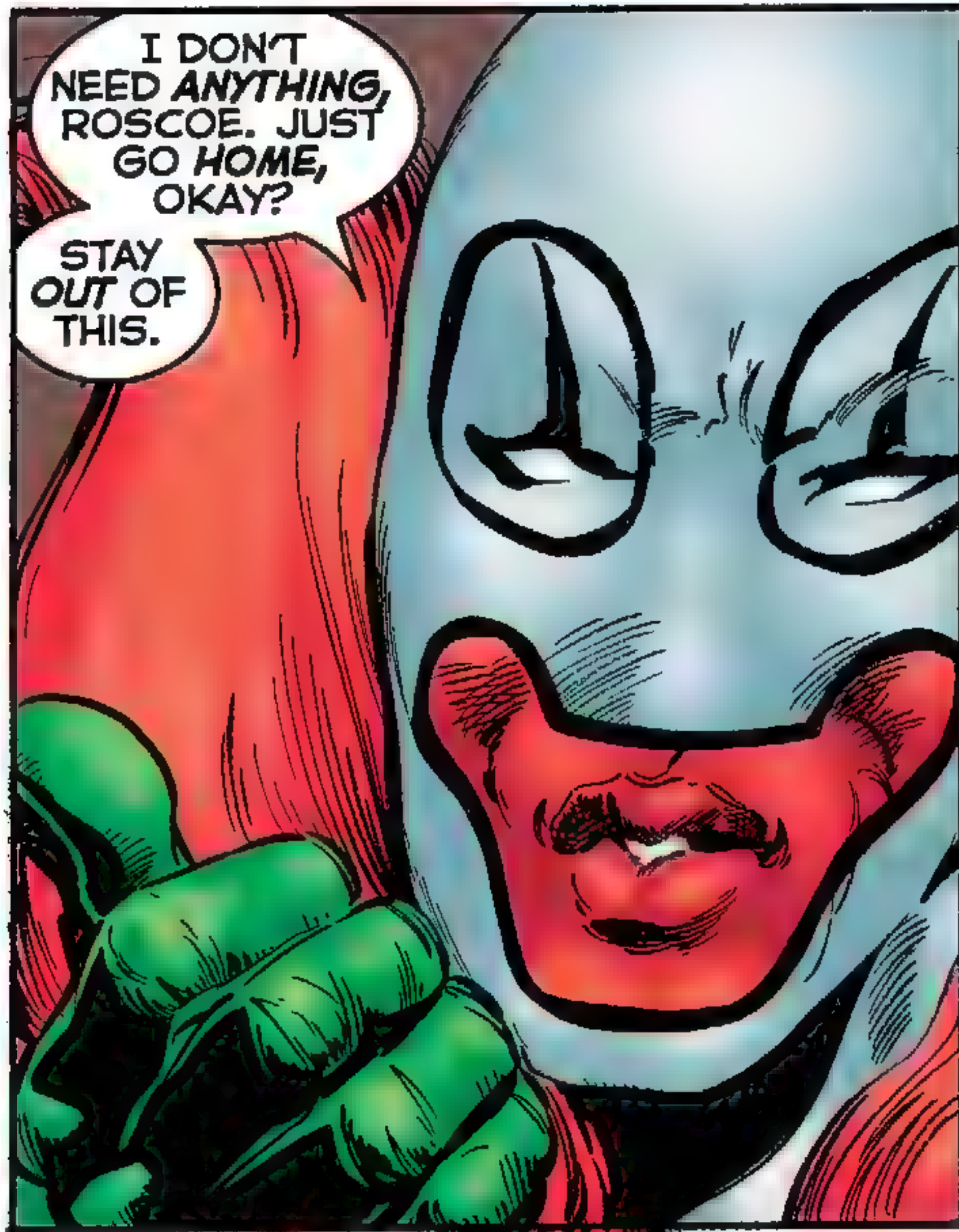
HEY,
JACKS!

HUH?



THE TROUBLE BOYS? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

WE SEEN YOU WERE IN A SCRAP, SO WE FIGURE WE PITCHIN' IN. WHAT YOU NEED?



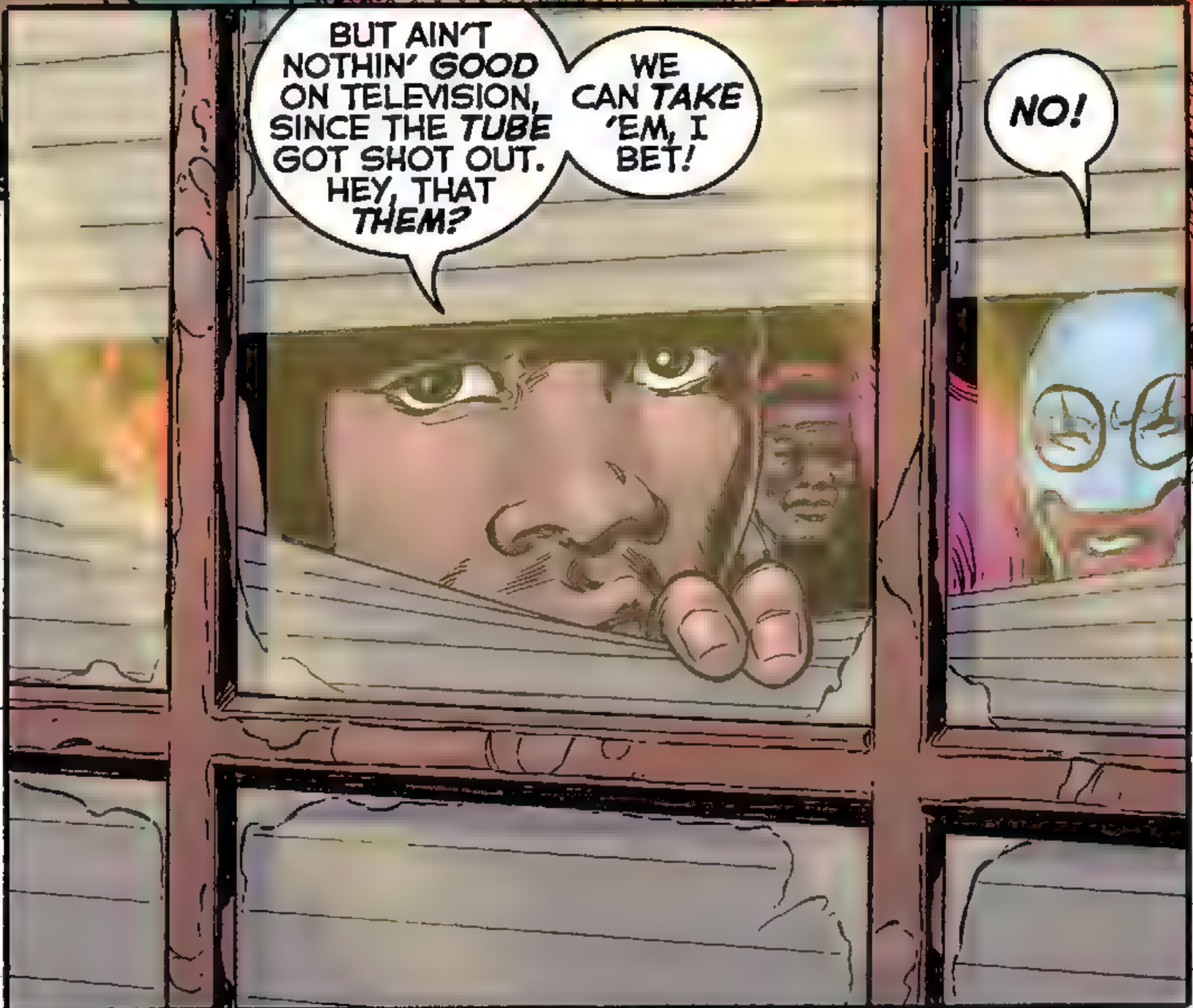
I DON'T NEED ANYTHING, ROSCOE. JUST GO HOME, OKAY?

STAY OUT OF THIS.



HE'S HERE. I CAN SMELL HIM.

CHK



BUT AIN'T NOTHIN' GOOD ON TELEVISION, SINCE THE TUBE GOT SHOT OUT. HEY, THAT THEM?

WE CAN TAKE 'EM, I BET!

NO!



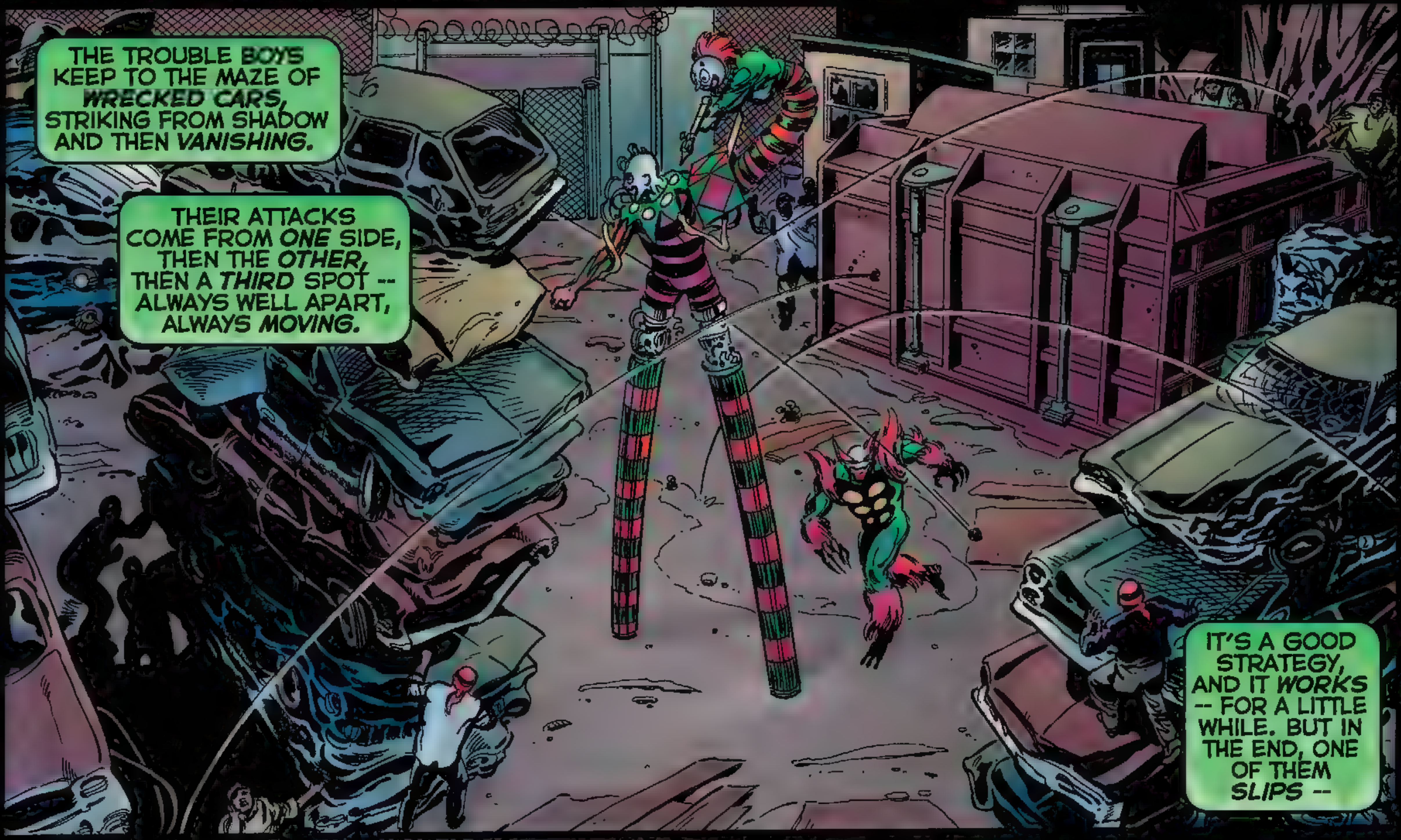
LOOK, IF YOU'RE DETERMINED TO DO SOMETHING, JUST DELAY THEM. DRAW THEIR ATTENTION, SO I CAN DO SOMETHING.

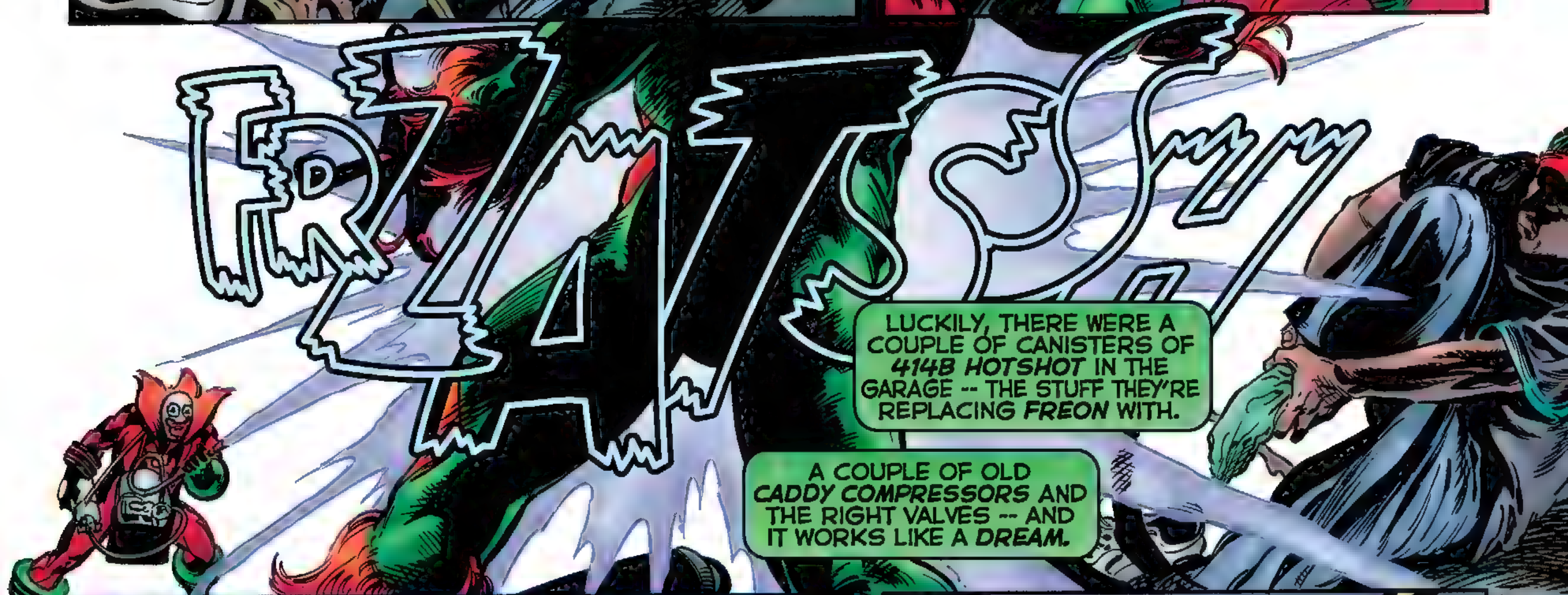
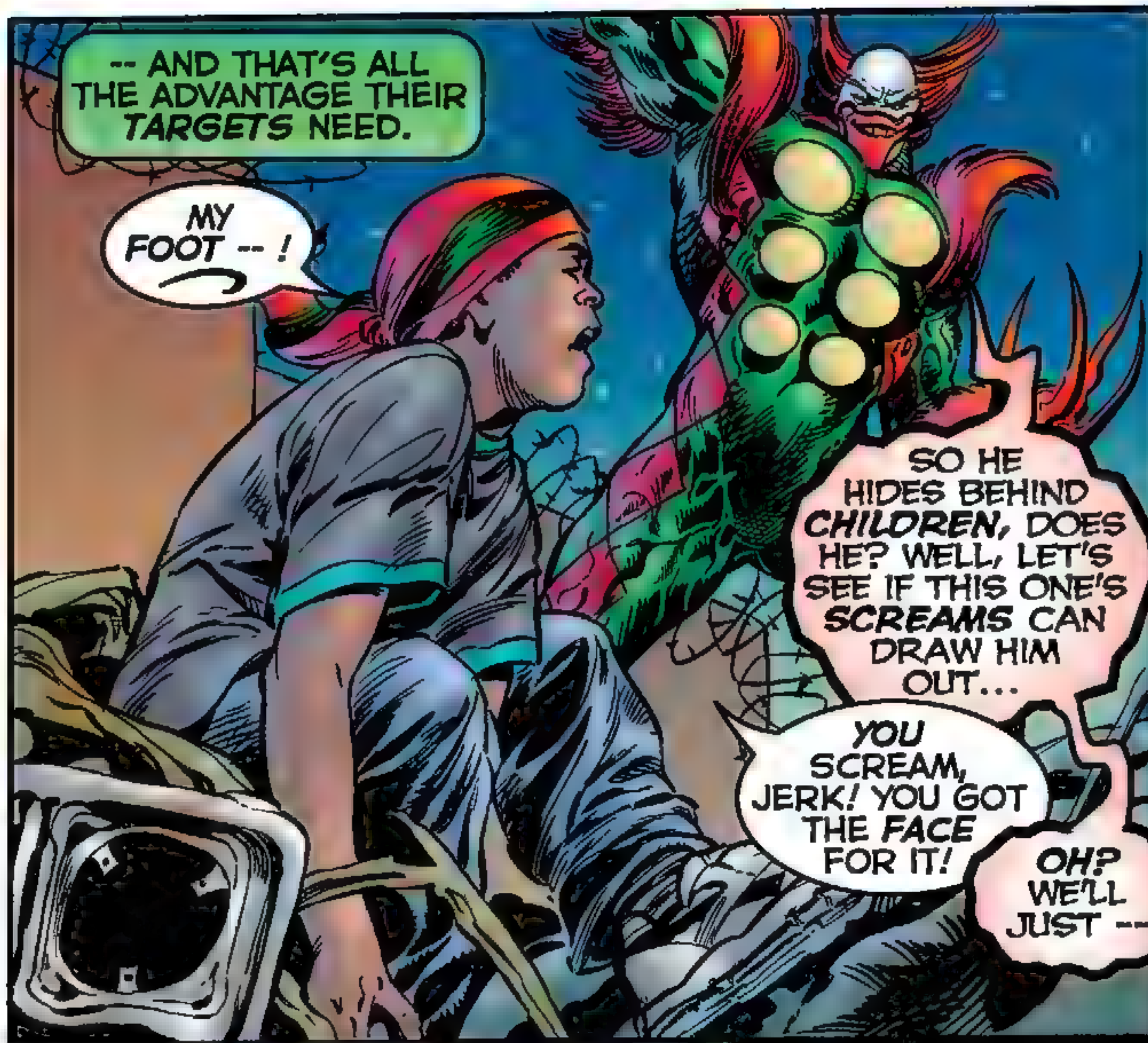
BUT DON'T LET THEM GET CLOSE.

HEY. WE THE TROUBLE BOYS, REMEMBER?

COME OUT,
PRETENDER!
COME OUT,
HERETIC!

JUSTICE!
DEATH!

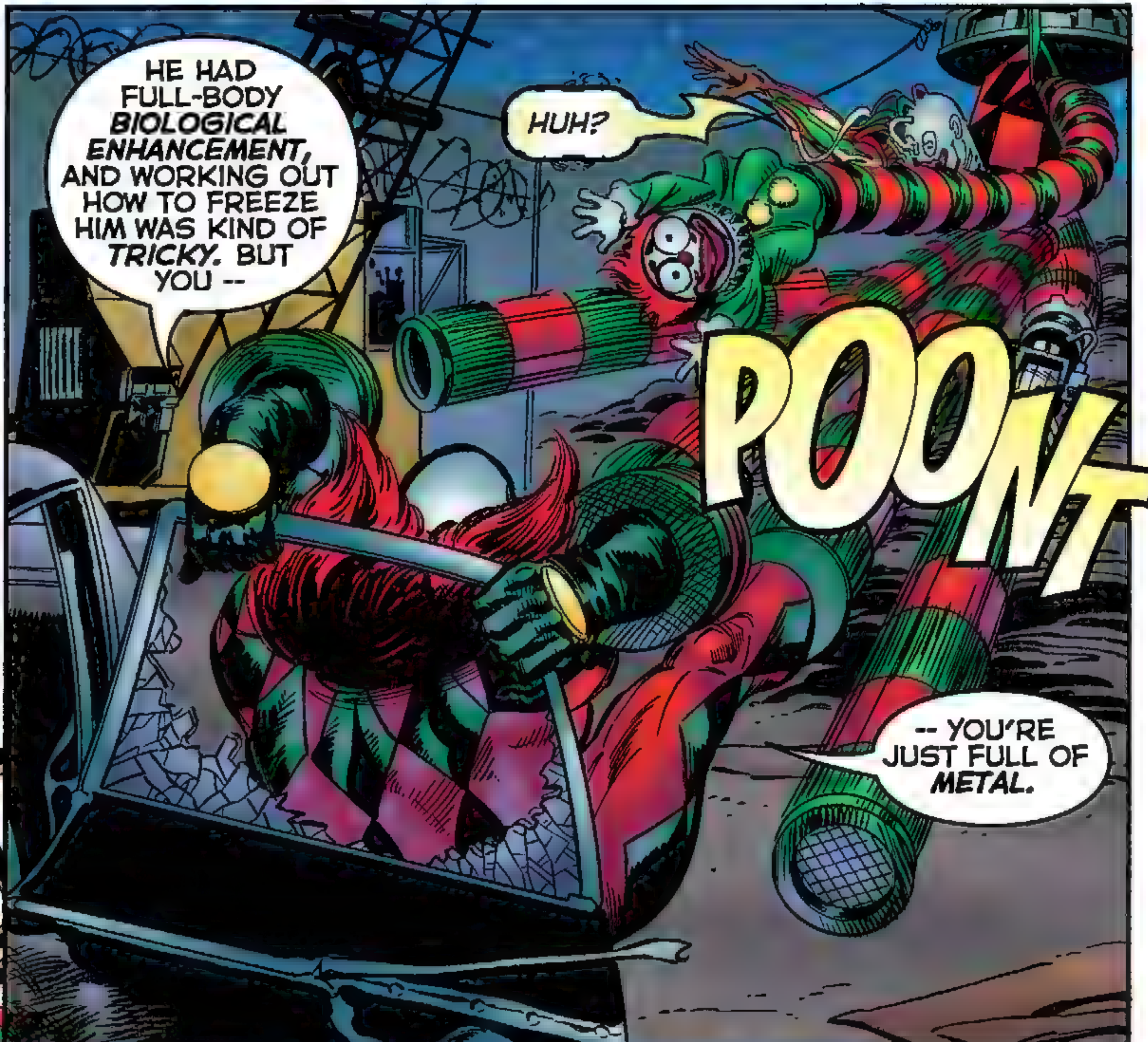






BOX --

-- HE
WAS THE
TOUGH
ONE.



HE HAD
FULL-BODY
BIOLOGICAL
ENHANCEMENT,
AND WORKING OUT
HOW TO FREEZE
HIM WAS KIND OF
TRICKY. BUT
YOU --

HUH?

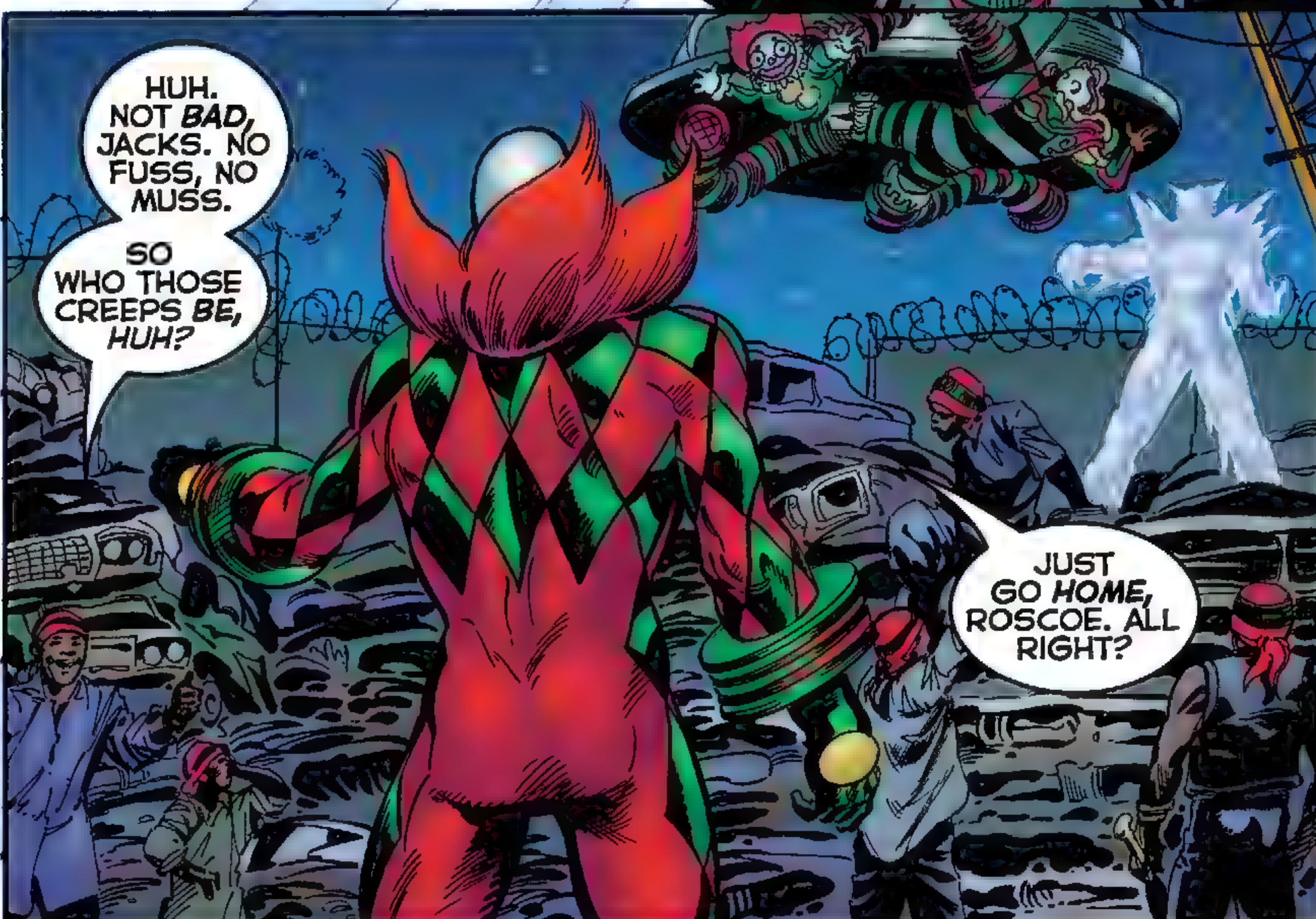
POON

-- YOU'RE
JUST FULL OF
METAL.



AND
THAT'S JUST
WHAT THEY MAKE
ELECTRO-
MAGNETS
FOR.

NO! NO --
ORDER!
ORDERRRR...



HUH.
NOT BAD,
JACKS. NO
FUSS, NO
MUSS.

SO
WHO THOSE
CREEPS BE,
HUH?

JUST
GO HOME,
ROSCOE. ALL
RIGHT?



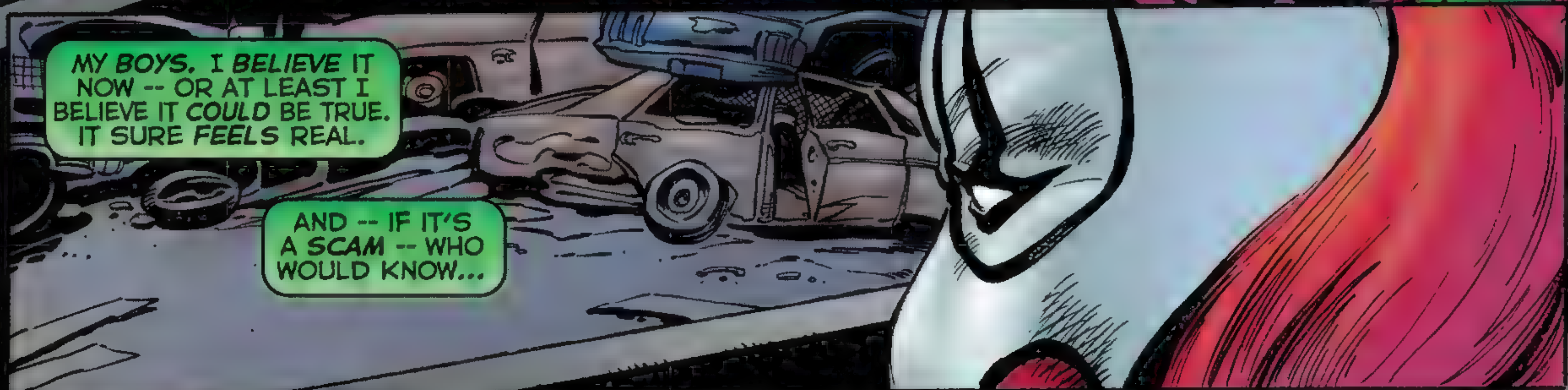
JUST --
LEAVE ME
ALONE FOR
A WHILE...



I WAIT UNTIL THE COPS
ARRIVE, THEN WAIT FURTHER,
WHILE THEY CALL IN THE SPECIAL
INCARCERATION SQUAD.

JACKSON THAWS OUT, BUT
BY THEN THEY'VE GOT HIM
IN A JURY-RIGGED CAGE.

AND THE WHOLE TIME, NEITHER
OF THEM SAY ANYTHING. THEY
JUST STARE AT ME WITH
BALEFUL, HATE-FILLED EYES.



MY BOYS. I BELIEVE IT
NOW -- OR AT LEAST I
BELIEVE IT COULD BE TRUE.
IT SURE FEELS REAL.

AND -- IF IT'S
A SCAM -- WHO
WOULD KNOW...



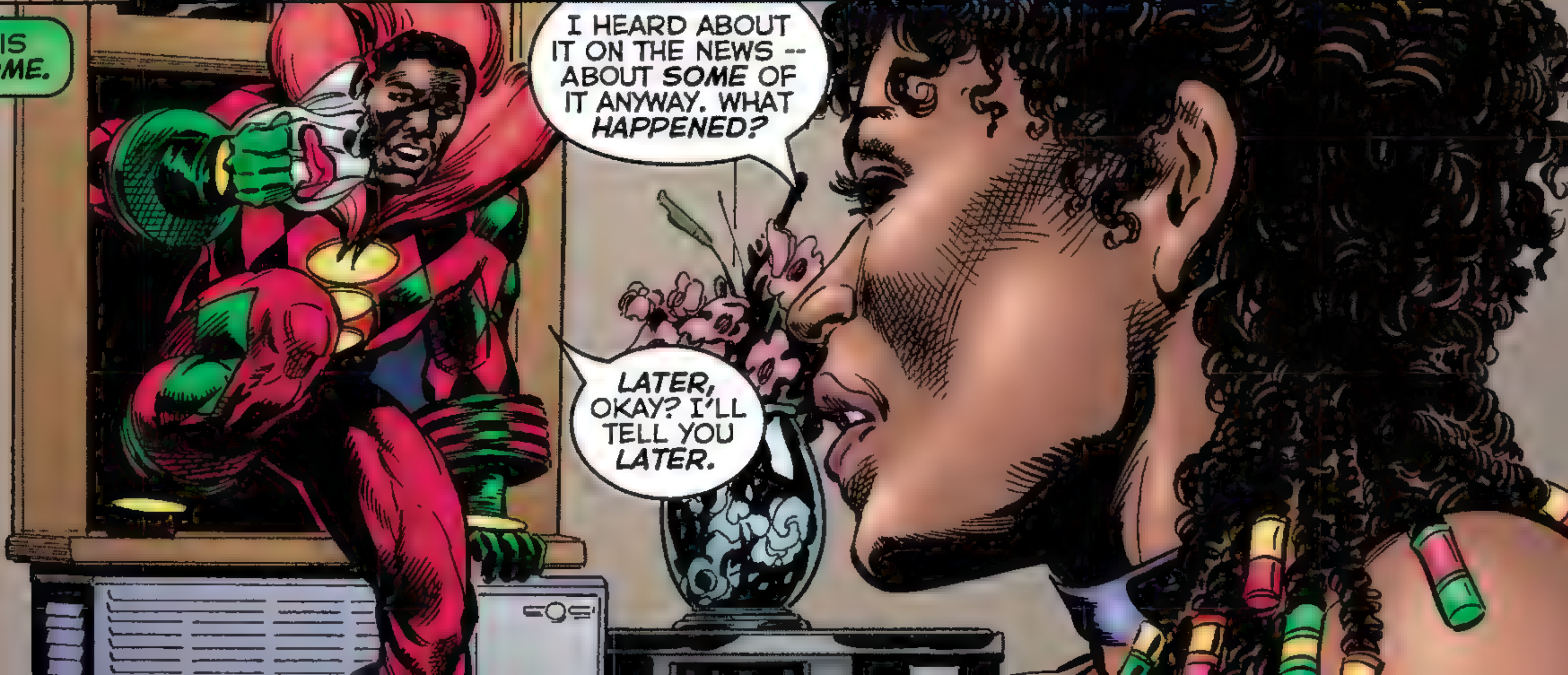
FINALLY, I CAN GO. AND I TELL
MYSELF I DON'T HAVE TO THINK
ABOUT IT. I DON'T HAVE ANY
KIDS. TAMRA AND I TALKED
ABOUT IT, BUT THAT'S ALL.

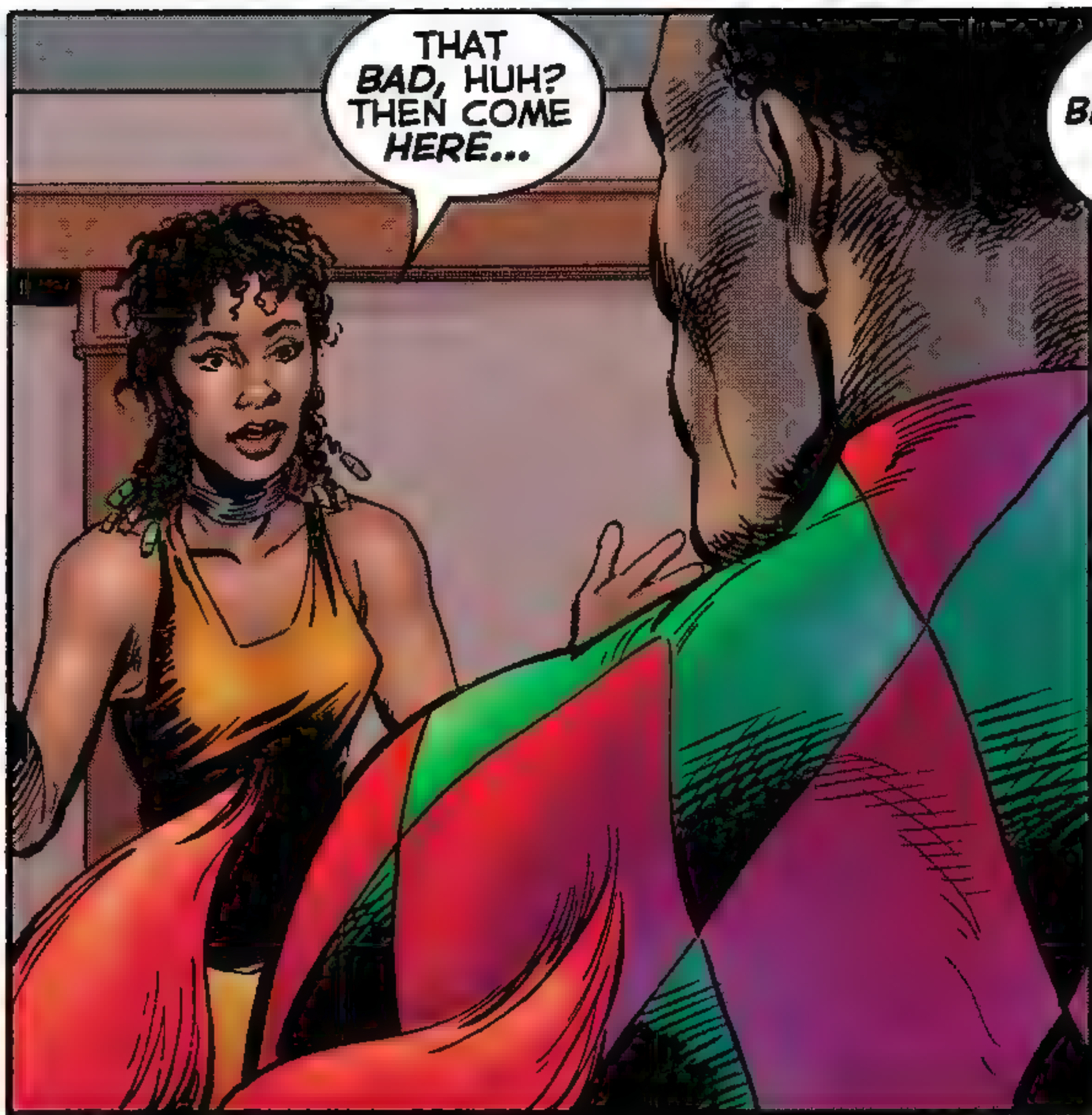
ALL I
WANT -- ALL
I WANT --

-- IS
HOME.

I HEARD ABOUT
IT ON THE NEWS --
ABOUT SOME OF
IT ANYWAY. WHAT
HAPPENED?

LATER,
OKAY? I'LL
TELL YOU
LATER.





THAT
BAD, HUH?
THEN COME
HERE...

YOU KNOW HOW
TO MAKE ME FEEL
BETTER, TAM. YOU ALWAYS
DO. SO LET'S TALK
ABOUT SOMETHING.
ANYTHING.

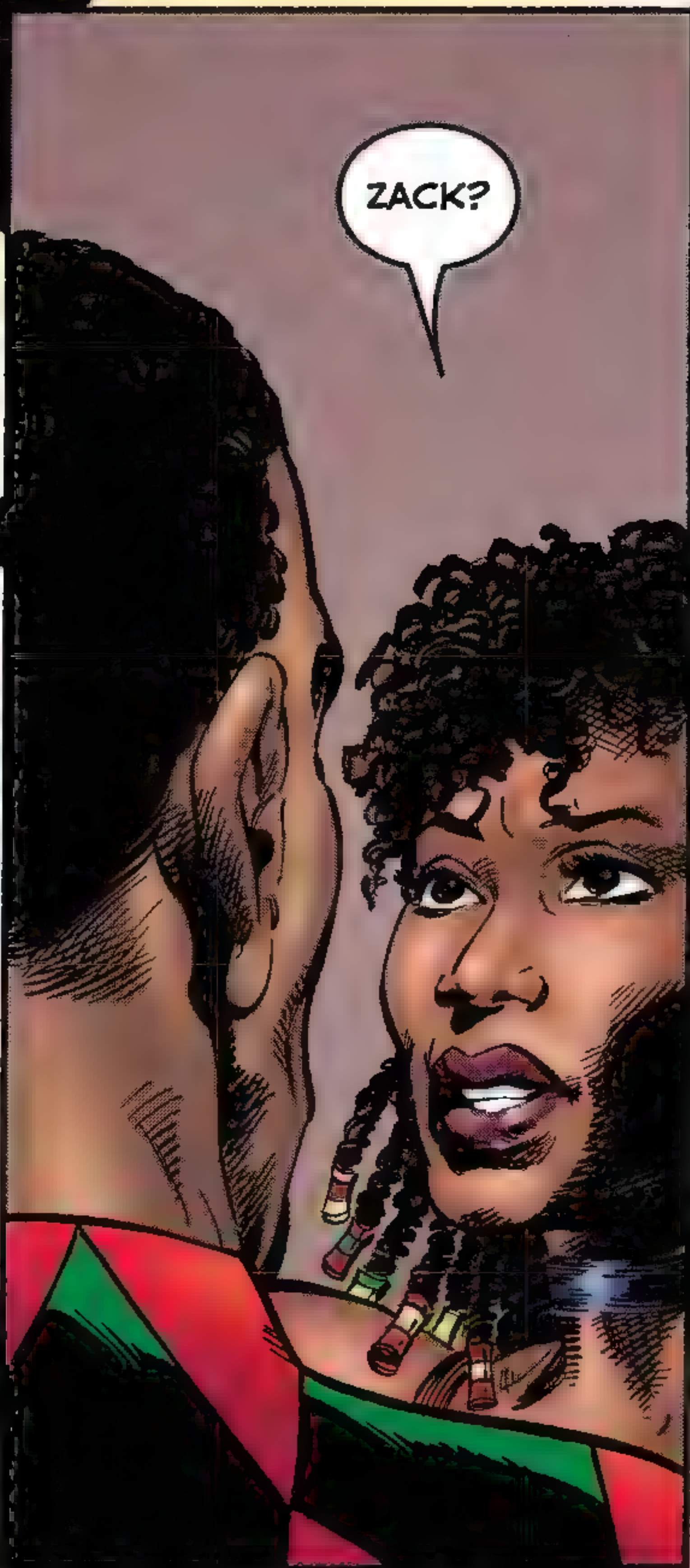


WHAT WAS
IT YOU WANTED
TO TELL ME
EARLIER?

WELL,
I'D HOPED
FOR A *CHEERIER*
MOMENT THAN THIS,
BUT IT'S GOOD NEWS,
SO MAYBE IT'LL
HELP. ZACHARY
JOHNSON...



WE'RE
GOING TO
HAVE A
BABY.



ZACK?



ZACK, WHAT
IS IT? WHAT'S
WRONG?





18



Father's Day



"MY FATHER WAS
THE ORIGINAL
JACK-IN-THE-BOX."



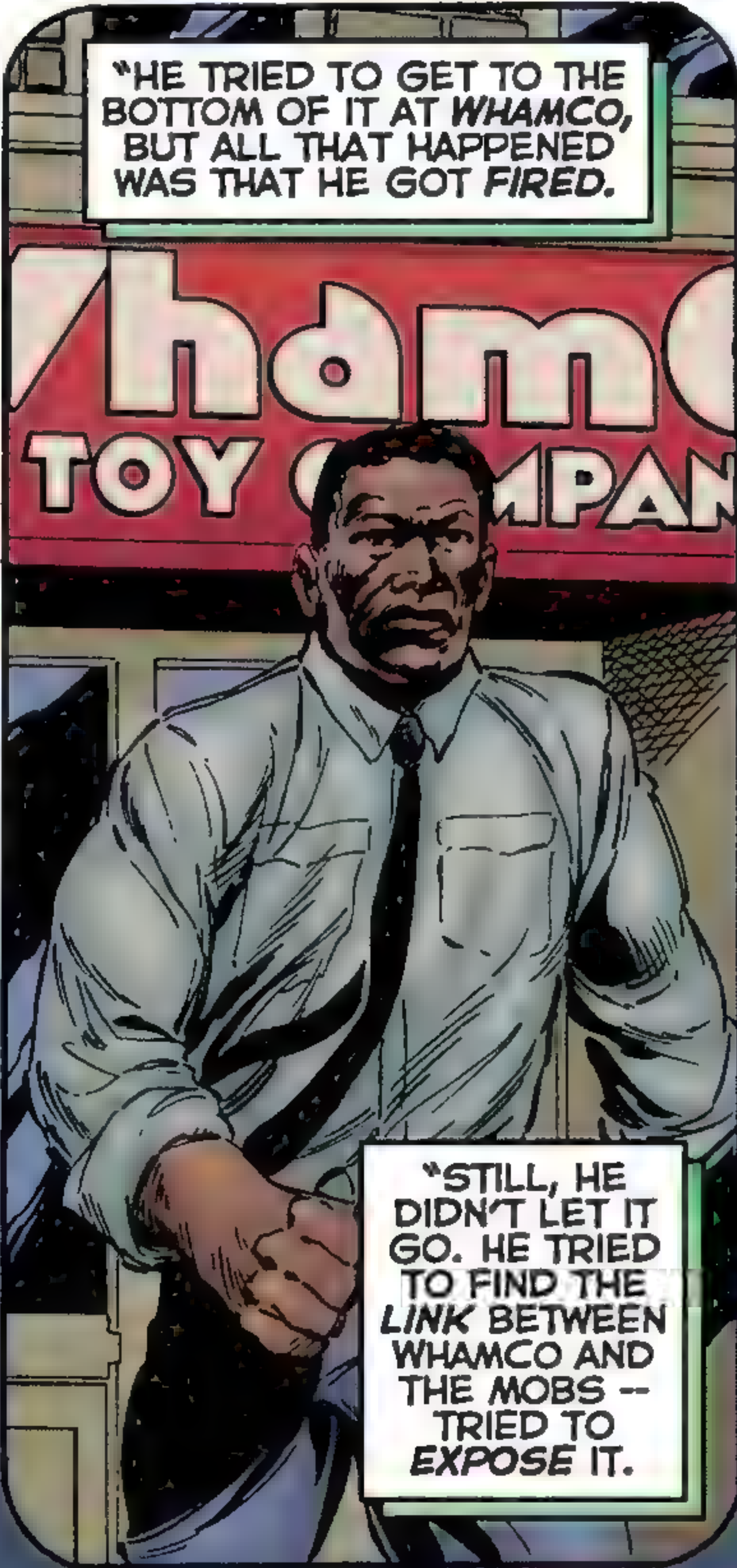
*HE WAS A DESIGNER FOR WHAMCO TOYS. A BLACK DESIGNER IN THE EARLY SIXTIES WAS UNUSUAL, BUT HE WAS TALENTED --

*-- SO THEY HIRED HIM, AND PAID HIM HALF WHAT LESS PRODUCTIVE WHITE DESIGNERS MADE.



*BUT THEN, BY CHANCE, HE DISCOVERED THAT SOME OF HIS TOY DESIGNS WERE BEING USED IN WEAPONS --

*-- WEAPONS USED BY THE UNDERWORLD.



*HE TRIED TO GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT AT WHAMCO, BUT ALL THAT HAPPENED WAS THAT HE GOT FIRED.

*STILL, HE DIDN'T LET IT GO. HE TRIED TO FIND THE LINK BETWEEN WHAMCO AND THE MOBS -- TRIED TO EXPOSE IT.



*NOBODY BELIEVED HIM, BUT WHAMCO WANTED HIM TO SHUT UP ANYWAY.

*SO THEY HAD HIS FATHER -- MY GRANDFATHER -- KIDNAPPED.

*THAT'S WHEN HE CUSTOMIZED SOME OF HIS TOY DESIGNS, WORKED UP A COSTUME --

*-- AND BECAME JACK-IN-THE-BOX -- FIRST TO RESCUE MY GRANDFATHER, AND THEN TO CONTINUE HIS INVESTIGATION.

*HE TOOK ON THE MOBS, HE TOOK ON WHAMCO, AND EVENTUALLY HE EXPOSED THEM. HE WON.



*BUT HE STILL KEPT FIGHTING -- FOR OTHERS WHO'D BEEN VICTIMIZED, WHO NEEDED HELP. HE'D BECOME A HERO.

"AND THEN
ON OCTOBER
13, 1983 --

"-- HE *DIED*, KILLED IN AN
EXPLOSION WHILE FIGHTING
MINIONS OF THE *UNDERLORD*.

"BUT HE TOOK THE *UNDERLORD*
DOWN, TOO -- OR SO IT SEEMED.
HE DIED *SAVING* PEOPLE. MAKING
THE WORLD A *BETTER* PLACE.

"ME, I WAS TWELVE.
AND I DIDN'T KNOW
ANY OF THIS.

"BUT I FOLLOWED IN MY
FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS --
STUDYING *ENGINEERING*,
DESIGNING TOYS OF
MY OWN --

"-- AND
WHEN I WAS
EIGHTEEN, MY
MOTHER DIED
TOO. AND IN
THE PROCESS
OF SETTLING
THE ESTATE --

"MY MOTHER EITHER
NEVER *KNEW*, OR SHE
THOUGHT I WAS TOO
YOUNG TO KNOW. SO
I DIDN'T GET TOLD.

"-- I FOUND MY FATHER'S
GADGETS AND JOURNALS.
I FOUND THE TRUTH.

"THERE WAS A LOT
IN THOSE JOURNALS --
INCLUDING THE
UNDERLORD'S TRUE
IDENTITY. AND HE
WASN'T DEAD.

"I BECAME THE *SECOND* JACK-
IN-THE-BOX THEN. TO BRING IN
THE UNDERLORD, TO GET
JUSTICE FOR MY FATHER.

"AND BY
THE TIME I
MANAGED
THAT --

"-- I STAYED IN COSTUME, LIKE HE HAD. I BECAME A SUPERHERO, TOO.

YOU KNOW ALL THAT. I'VE TOLD IT A DOZEN TIMES. BUT THERE'S MORE TO IT. THERE'S A PART I'VE NEVER REALLY TALKED ABOUT.

THAT'S THE PART ABOUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE TWELVE YEARS OLD AND HAVE YOUR FATHER JUST... VANISH.

"I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED. MY MOM SAID HE WAS DEAD, BUT THERE WAS NO BODY, NO FUNERAL.

"WAS HE REALLY DEAD? OR WAS HE JUST GONE? DID HE LEAVE -- DID HE JUST NOT LOVE US? I DIDN'T KNOW.

"I CAME UP WITH ALL KINDS OF FANTASIES -- HE WAS A SPY, OR AN UNDERCOVER COP. OR IN THE WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAM.

"SOMETIMES, I EVEN IMAGINED HE WAS A DARING CRIMINAL MASTERMIND, ON THE RUN FROM THE LAW. STUPID, HUH?

"BUT THE BOTTOM LINE WAS, HE WAS GONE. AND I SPENT SIX YEARS TRYING TO FILL THAT HOLE --

"-- TRYING TO WIN THE APPROVAL OF A GHOST, TO BE WHAT MY FATHER WOULD HAVE WANTED WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT THAT WAS.

"AND IN THE END, WHEN I LEARNED THAT THE TRUTH EXCEEDED ALL MY FANTASIES, I WAS PROUD, AND I WAS HONORED --

"-- BUT STILL, THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT FELT HOLLOW --

"-- THAT FELT LIKE MY FATHER HAD CARED MORE ABOUT FIGHTING CRIME THAN ABOUT HIS FAMILY."



SO NOW,
WHEN YOU TELL ME
YOU'RE *PREGNANT* --
AND I'M THE ONE GOING
OUT THERE EVERY
NIGHT --

I -- I
THOUGHT YOU
WANTED KIDS.
I THOUGHT YOU
WANTED
THIS!



I DO, TAMRA,
I DO. IT'S
JUST --

-- I DIDN'T THINK WE'D
BE HAVING KIDS THIS
SOON. I DIDN'T THINK
ABOUT WHAT IT
MEANT --



*AND AFTER WHAT
HAPPENED TONIGHT, WITH
THOSE -- THOSE TWISTED
VERSIONS OF WHAT OUR
CHILD COULD *BECOME* --

*-- IT'S MADE ME THINK
ABOUT WHAT COULD
HAPPEN, AND WHAT THAT
COULD MEAN TO A *BABY*.



I NEVER *MINDED*
RISKING MY LIFE --
IT'S SOMETHING I
DO *WILLINGLY*, AND
SOMETHING YOU
KNEW I DID WHEN
YOU MARRIED
ME.

BUT A *BABY* --
WE CAN'T EXACTLY
ASK HIM -- OR
HER -- IF IT'S OKAY,
CAN WE? IF HE'D
MIND GROWING
UP WITHOUT A
FATHER?



I CAN
RISK MY
LIFE. BUT CAN
I RISK THE LIFE
OF MY CHILD'S
FATHER? IS
THAT FAIR
TO HIM?

OR
HER.

I'VE
NEVER ASKED
YOU FOR THIS --
EVEN THOUGH I
KNEW WHAT IT COULD
MEAN -- BUT, WELL,
YOU COULD
QUIT...



HOW? CAN I READ IN THE PAPER
ABOUT MURDER -- ABOUT RAPE,
AND MORE -- AND KNOW I
COULD HAVE STOPPED
IT?

HOW
COULD I
LIVE WITH
MYSELF?



I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M SAYING THIS -- CAN'T EVEN BELIEVE WE'RE TALKING ABOUT YOU DYING --

-- BUT FIREMEN, COPS, SOLDIERS -- THEY RISK THEIR LIVES, AND THEY HAVE FAMILIES...

I KNOW.

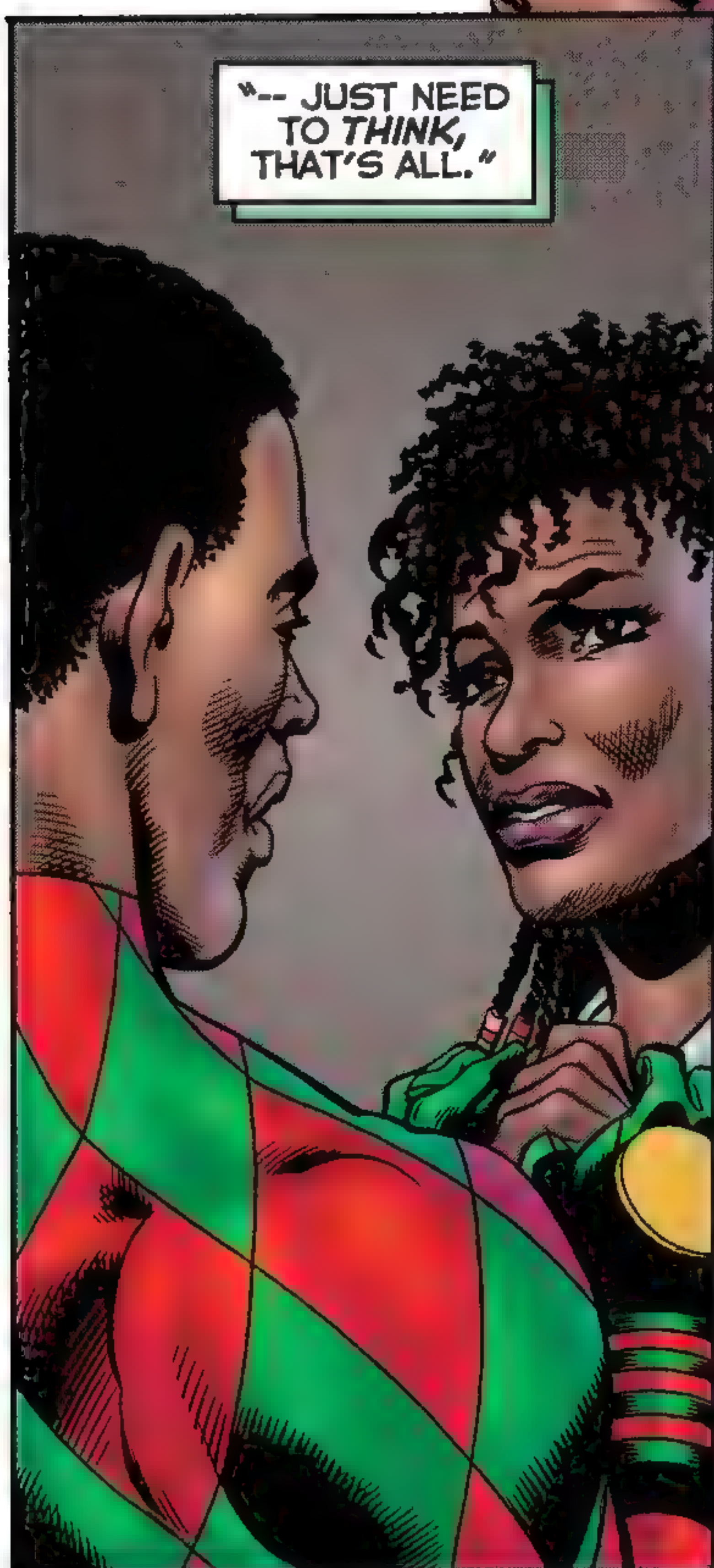


MAYBE IT'S JUST ME. MAYBE IT'S HOW I GREW UP. BUT I KNOW -- I KNOW WHAT I COULD BE PUTTING THAT BABY THROUGH --

-- AND I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN DO THAT.

SO WHAT YOU'RE SAYING -- YOU'RE SAYING YOU DON'T WANT TO HAVE THIS BABY?

I DIDN'T SAY THAT. I DIDN'T SAY THAT. I JUST --



"-- JUST NEED TO THINK, THAT'S ALL."



DAMMIT, THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE A HAPPY NIGHT.

THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO BE GOOD NEWS...

FINGER STREET
PRECINCT STATION.

DETECTIVE WILLIAMS LETS ME
IN, TO WHERE THEY'RE BEING
HELD FOR PROCESSING, BEFORE
THEY'RE MOVED TO BIRO ISLAND.

I LOOK AT THEM,
AND I DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO THINK.

ARE THEY MY SONS --
SOMETHING THAT MY
CHILDREN COULD
BECOME, IN SOME
WARPED FUTURE?

COULD THIS REALLY
HAPPEN? IF I DIED,
COULD THE CHILD GROWING
INSIDE TAMRA BECOME --
SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

IS THAT REALLY
ALL I'VE GOT TO
GIVE TO MY FAMILY --
PAIN, AND A TWISTED,
HARMFUL LEGACY?

IS
IT?

YOU MUST BE JUDGED,
FATHER. JUDGED FOR
FAILING YOUR SON. FOR
FAILING YOUR WORLD.

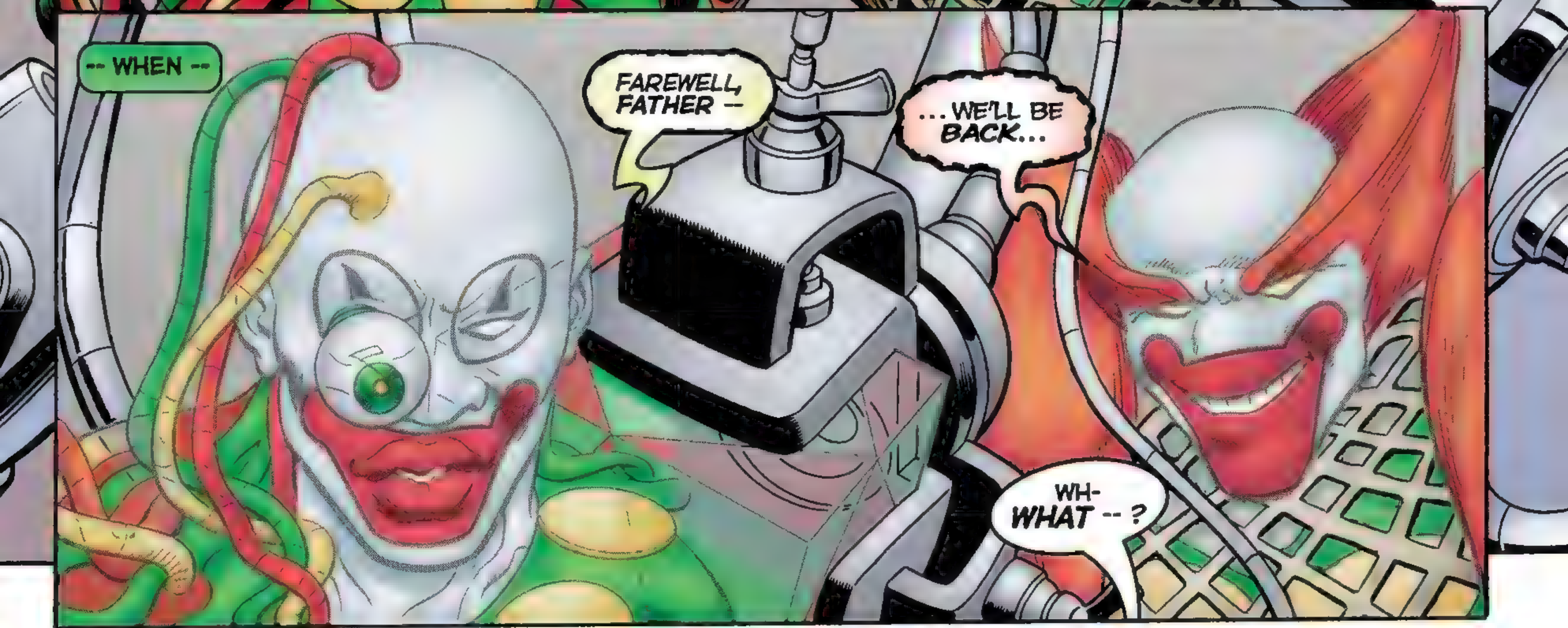
YOU ARE A
HERETIC AND A
FALSE PROPHET,
BLIND TO YOUR
OWN TEACHINGS.
YOU WILL BE
CLEANSED.



WE HAVE AGREED, FATHER. WE WILL NOT TELL THE PATHETIC POLICE OF THIS ERA ANYTHING ABOUT YOU. KEEP YOUR SECRETS --

UNTIL THE DAY WE PUNISH YOU. WE SHALL BE FREE -- AND WE SHALL BE THE INSTRUMENT OF YOUR DESTRUCTION.

I'M STILL TAKING THAT IN -- STILL REALIZING THAT THEY COULD HAVE JUST ANNOUNCED MY TRUE IDENTITY --



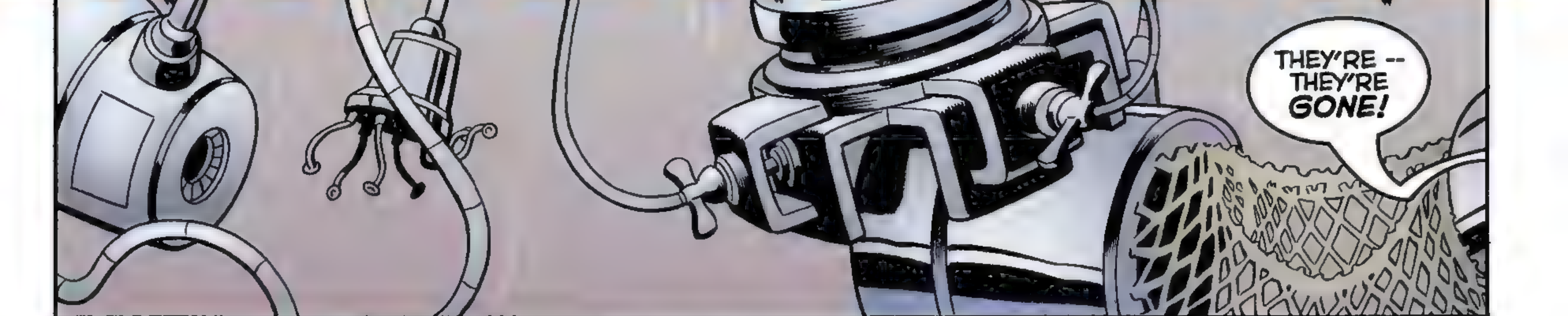
-- WHEN --

FAREWELL, FATHER --

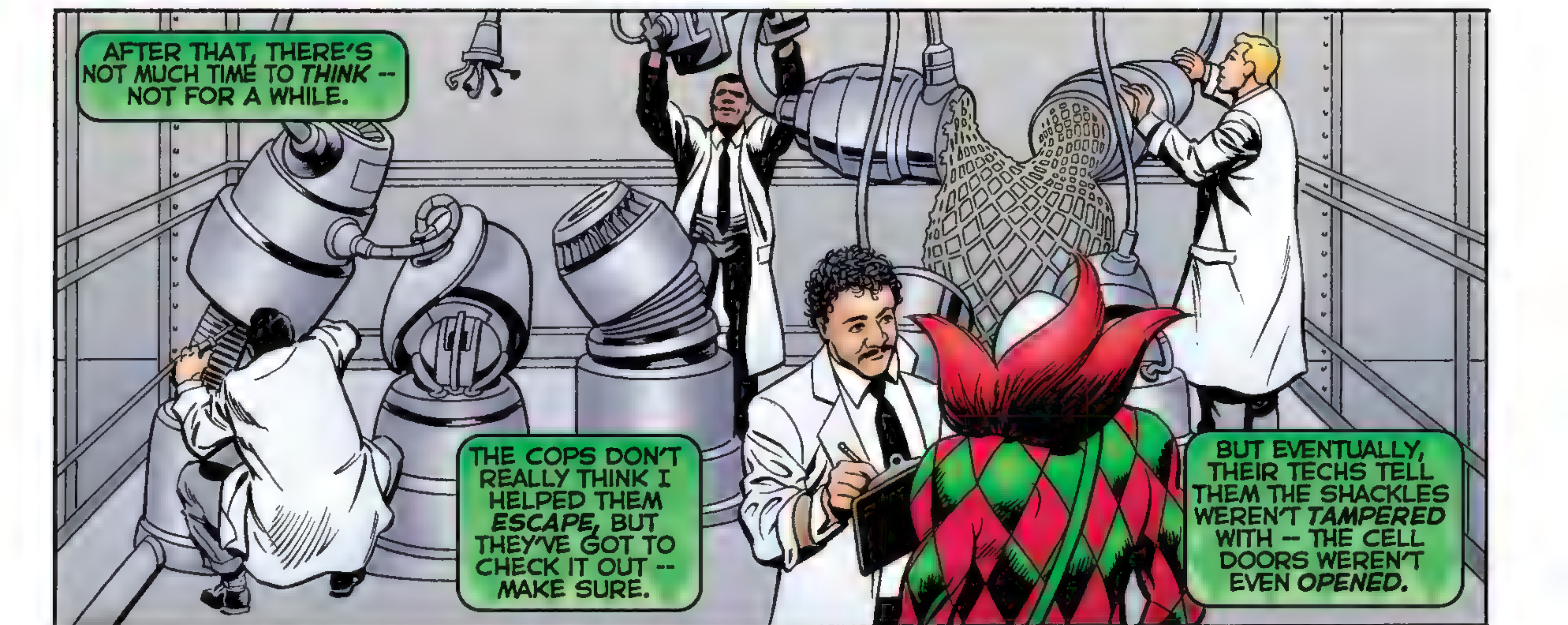
...WE'LL BE BACK...

WH- WHAT -- ?

LANGLANGLANGLANGLANG



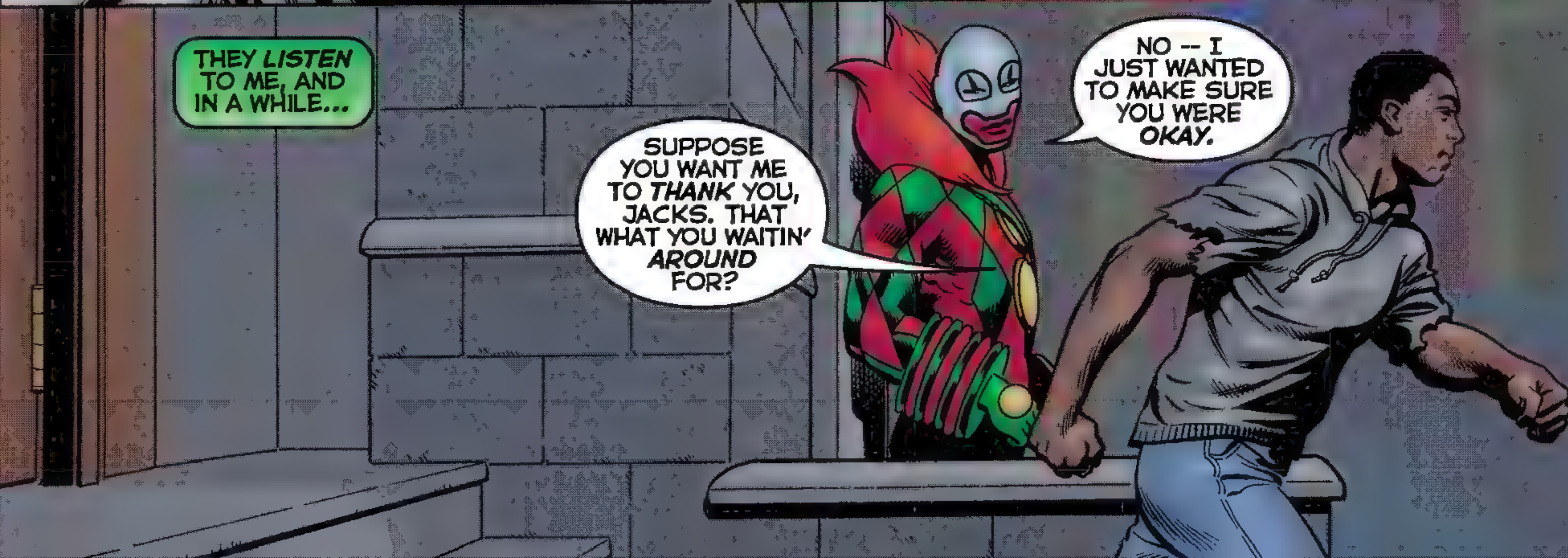
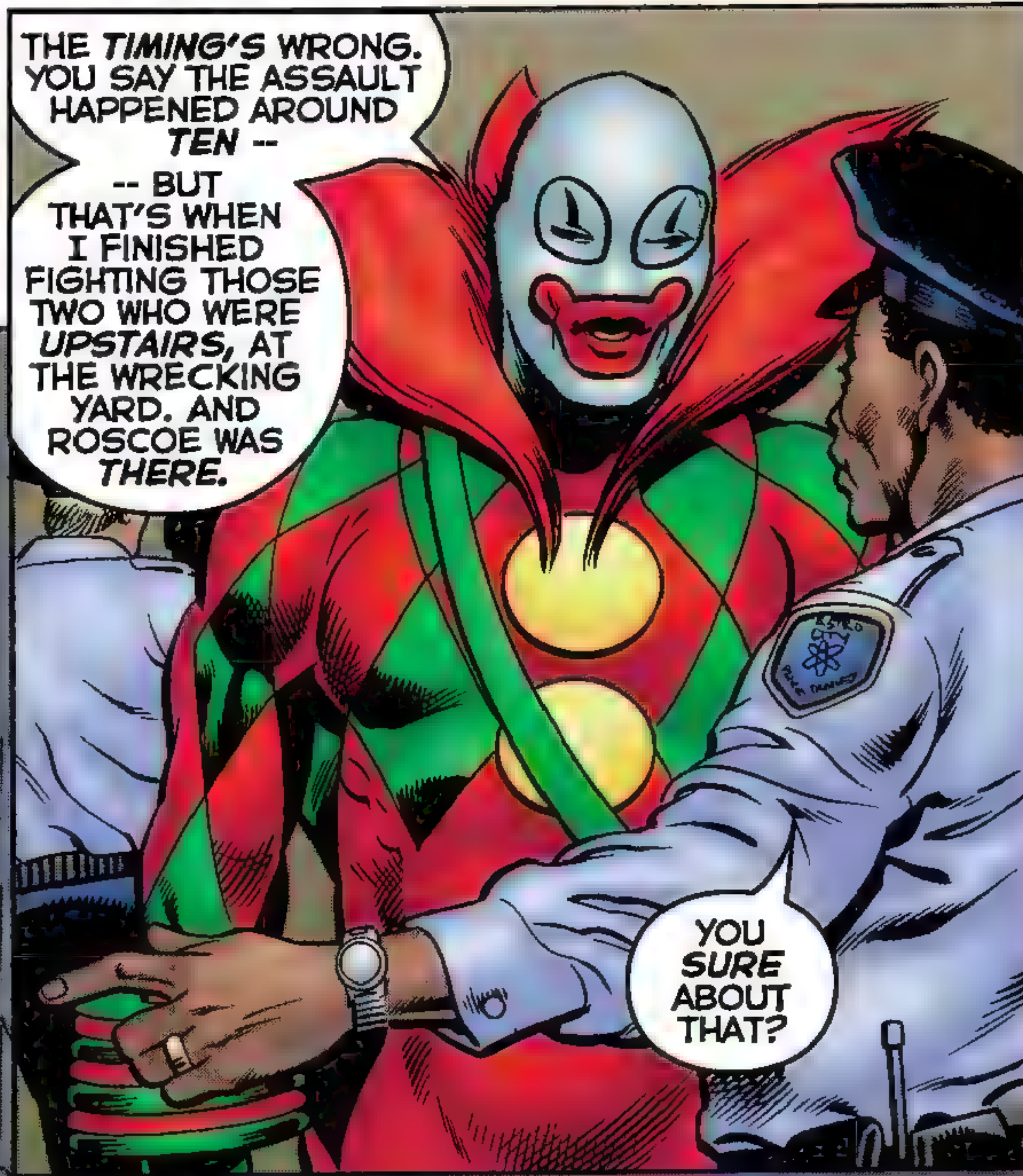
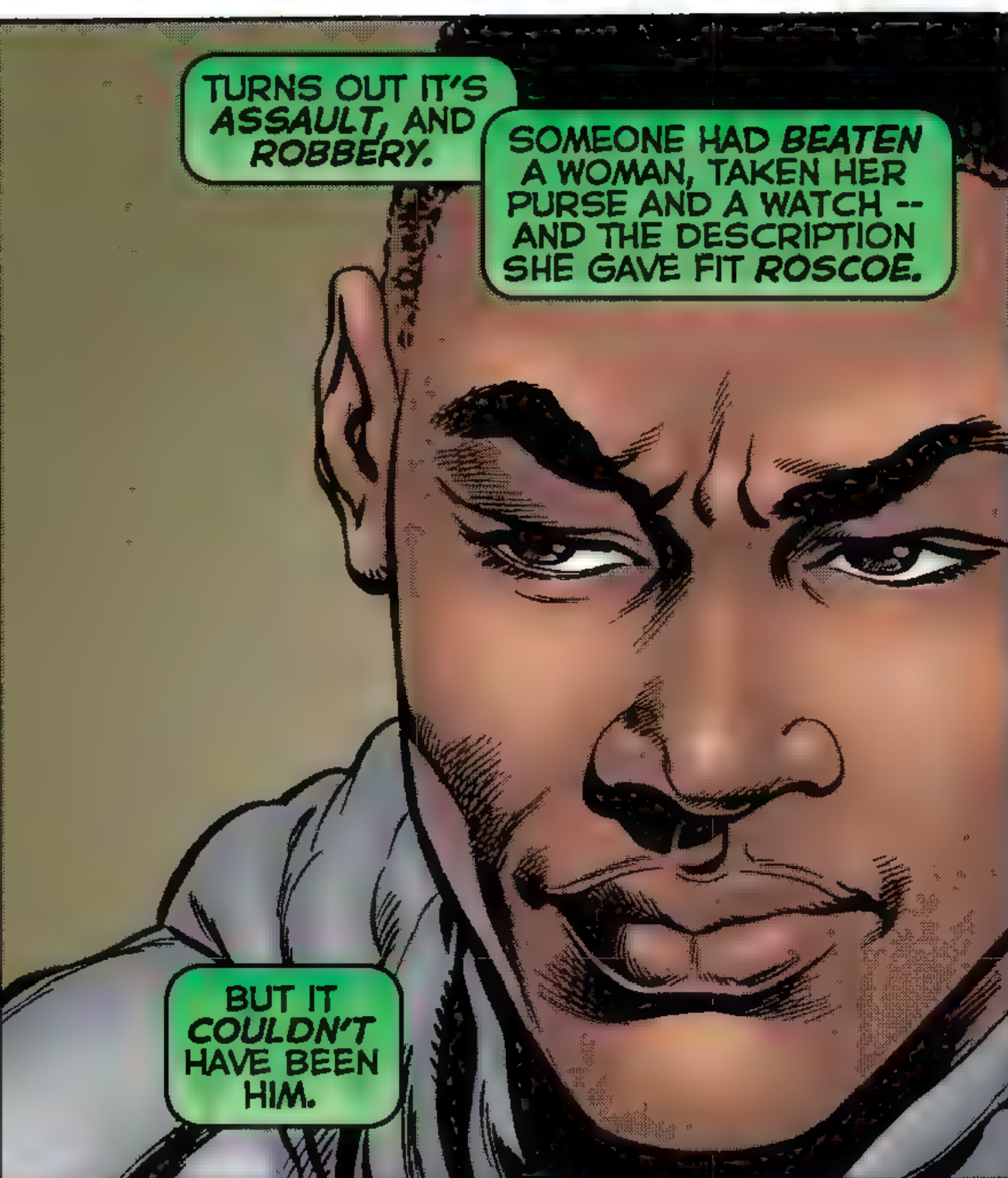
THEY'RE -- THEY'RE GONE!



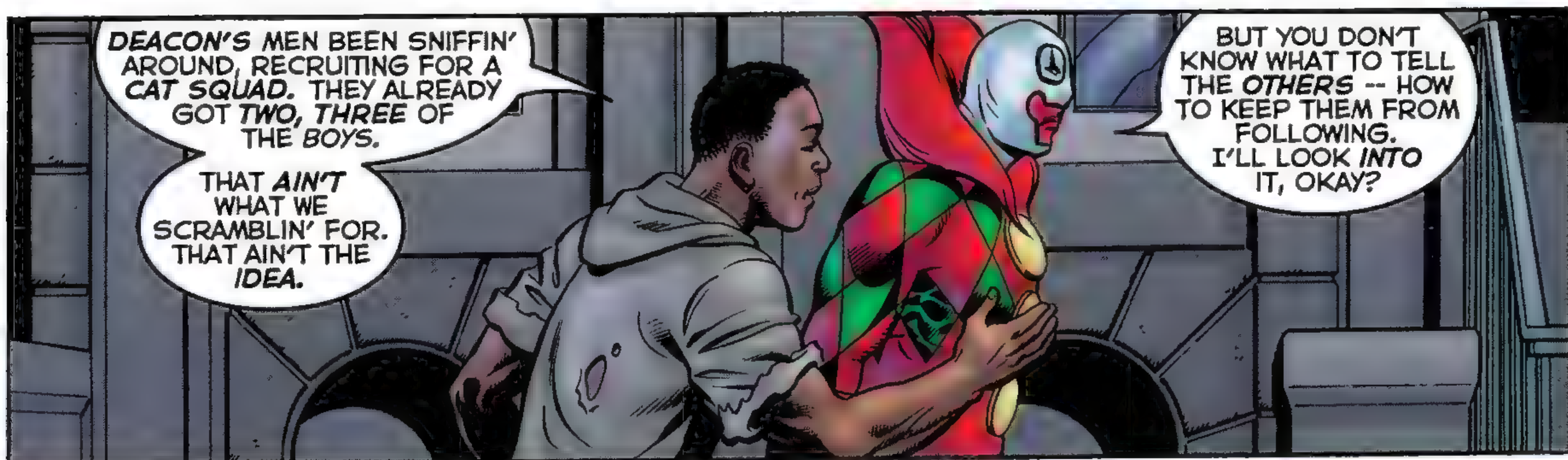
AFTER THAT, THERE'S NOT MUCH TIME TO THINK -- NOT FOR A WHILE.

THE COPS DON'T REALLY THINK I HELPED THEM ESCAPE, BUT THEY'VE GOT TO CHECK IT OUT -- MAKE SURE.

BUT EVENTUALLY, THEIR TECHS TELL THEM THE SHACKLES WEREN'T TAMPERED WITH -- THE CELL DOORS WEREN'T EVEN OPENED.









I'VE BEEN FOLLOWING YOU AROUND ALL NIGHT -- TRYING TO WORK UP THE COURAGE TO TALK TO YOU.

AND YOU ARE...?

OH, I'M SORRY.



I'M JEROME JOHNSON. LIKE THOSE OTHER TWO, ah, GENTLEMEN, I'M YOUR SON. FROM THE FUTURE -- OR A FUTURE.

YOU'RE WITH THEM?

OH, NO, SIR. THAT'S NOT REALLY POSSIBLE, TEMPORALLY SPEAKING.



SEE, WE'RE ALL THE SAME PERSON, SORT OF. FROM YOUR VANTAGE POINT, WE'RE FROM WHAT YOU'D CALL POTENTIAL FUTURES.

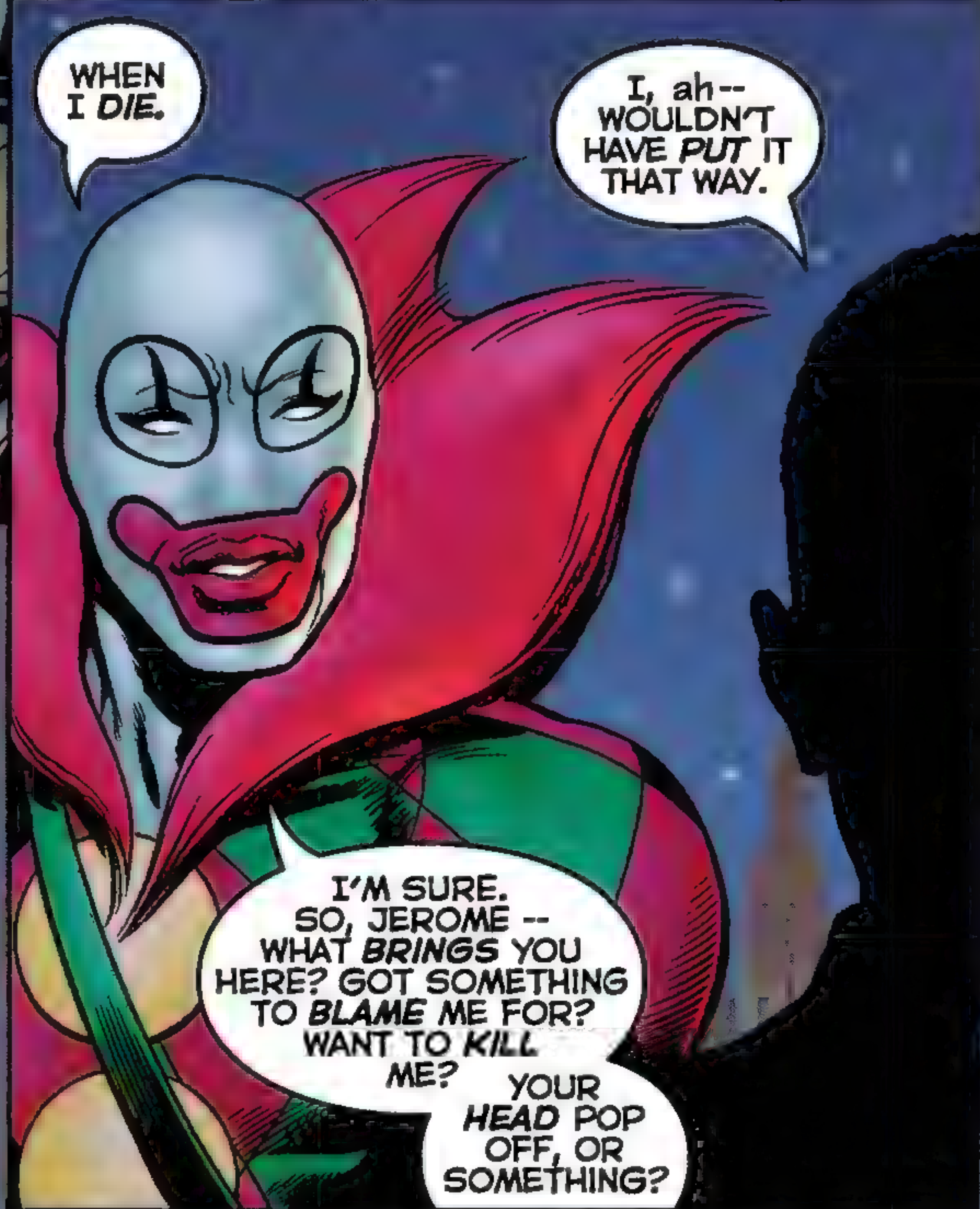
RIGHT NOW, WE'RE ALL POSSIBILITIES. AS TIME MOVES ON FOR YOU, THOUGH, YOU'LL MAKE CHOICES, TAKE ACTIONS --



-- AND THAT'LL NARROW DOWN THE POSSIBILITIES TO ONE ACTUALITY, AT ANY GIVEN TIME.

AND...YOU ALL JUST HAPPENED TO COME THE SAME NIGHT?

WELL, THERE'S NOT MUCH OF A WINDOW -- ah, BETWEEN WHEN WE BECAME POTENTIAL, AND WHEN, ah --



WHEN I DIE.

I, ah-- WOULDN'T HAVE PUT IT THAT WAY.

I'M SURE. SO, JEROME -- WHAT BRINGS YOU HERE? GOT SOMETHING TO BLAME ME FOR? WANT TO KILL ME?

YOUR HEAD POP OFF, OR SOMETHING?



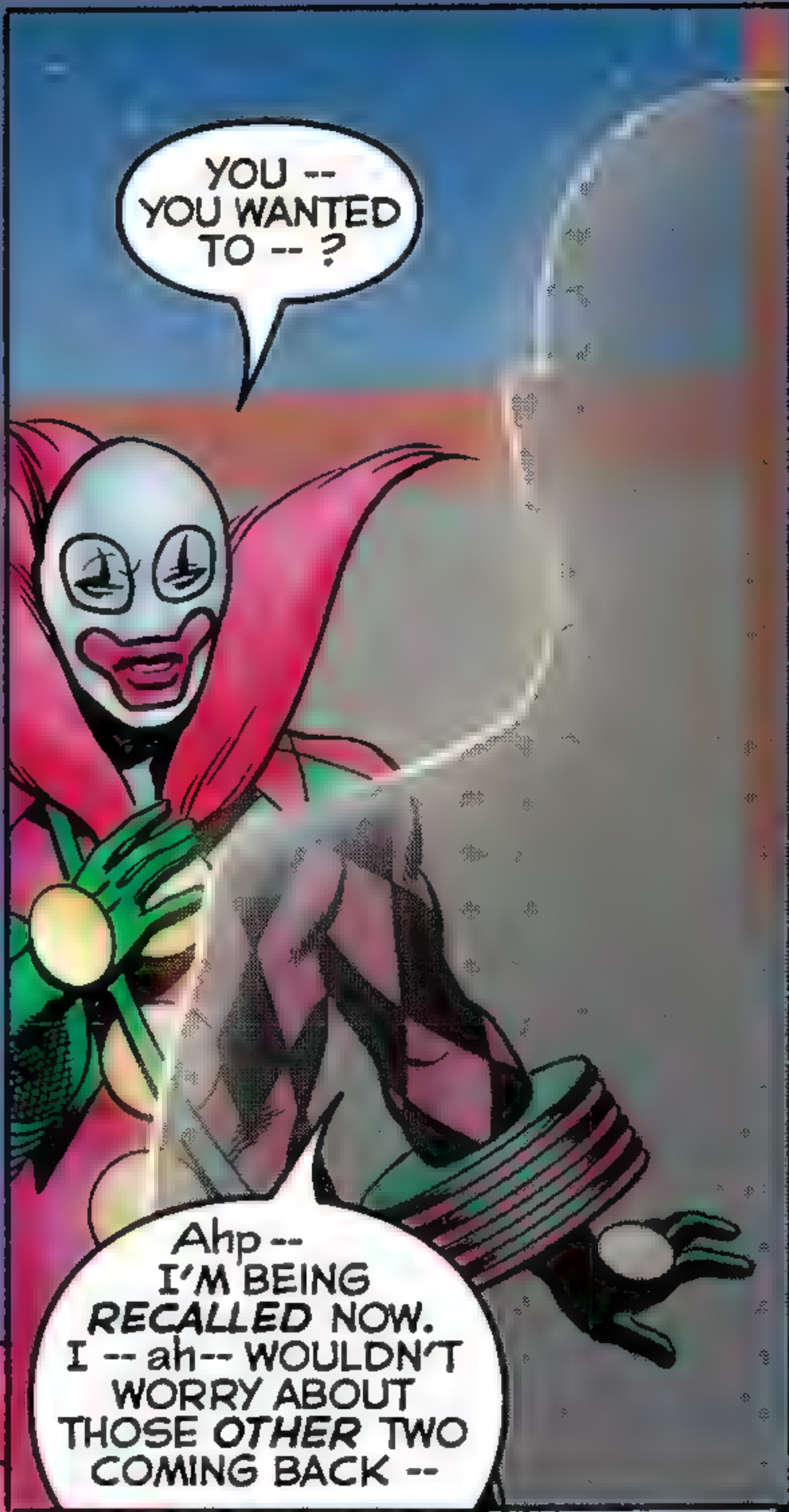
NO, SIR. I'M NO VIGILANTE. I'M A COLLEGE PROFESSOR, DOING SOME RESEARCH IN CHRONAL FLOW.

I -- ah-- EXPECT I'LL GET IN TROUBLE FOR APPROPRIATING THIS MUCH POWER, BUT --



-- I -- ah --
I JUST WANTED
TO MEET YOU,
THAT'S ALL.

TO
SEE YOUR
FACE.



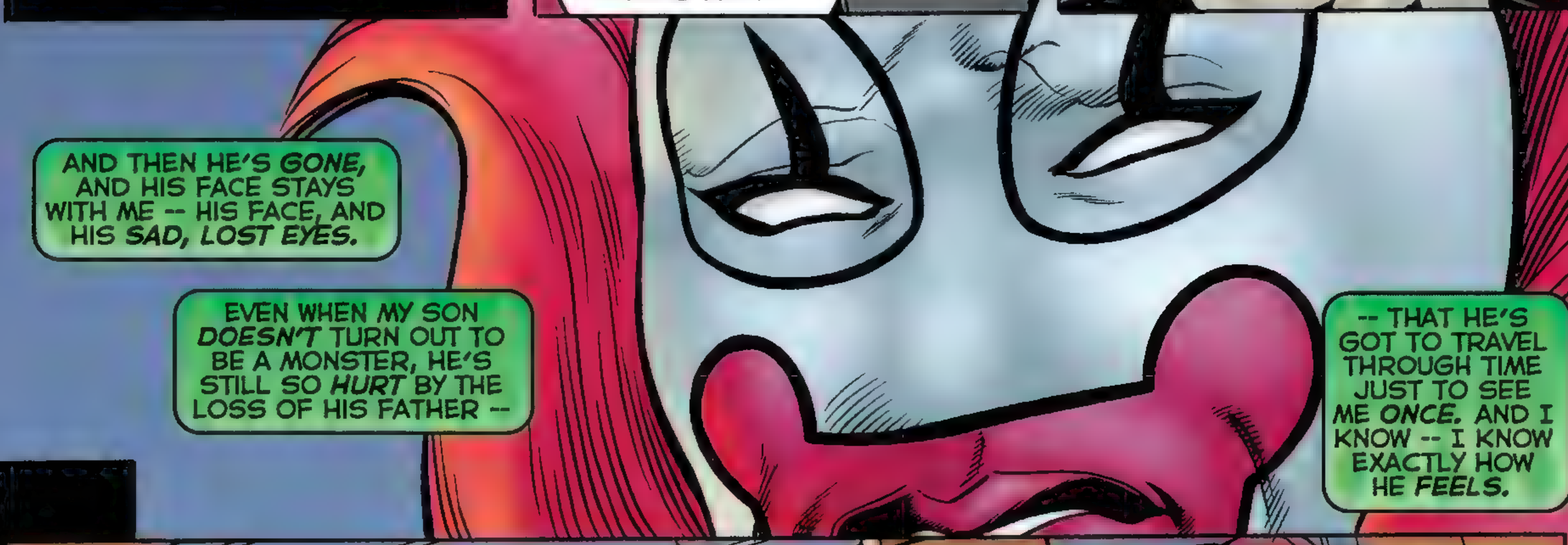
YOU --
YOU WANTED
TO -- ?

Ahp --
I'M BEING
RECALLED NOW.
I -- ah -- WOULDN'T
WORRY ABOUT
THOSE OTHER TWO
COMING BACK --



-- TIME-TRAVEL'S NOT
REALLY AS SIMPLE
AS IT SEEMS, AND
THEY'RE UNLIKELY
EVER TO BE ABLE
TO DO IT
TWICE --

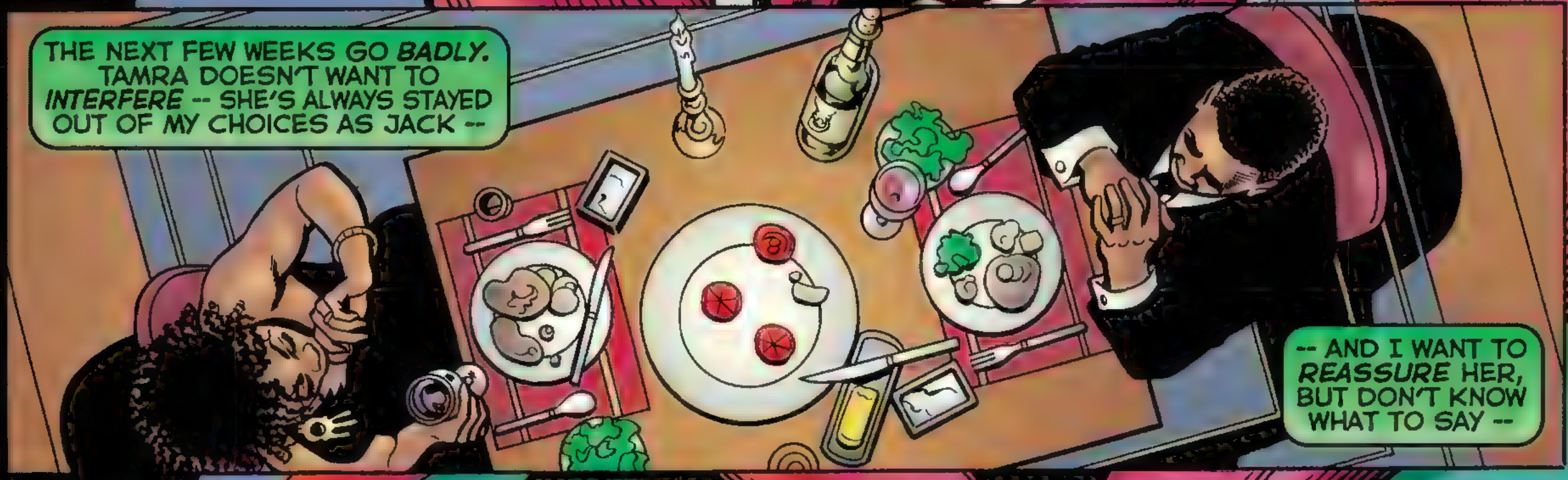
-- SO YOU
SEE, SIR,
THERE'S REALLY
NOTHING TO
WORRY --



AND THEN HE'S GONE,
AND HIS FACE STAYS
WITH ME -- HIS FACE, AND
HIS SAD, LOST EYES.

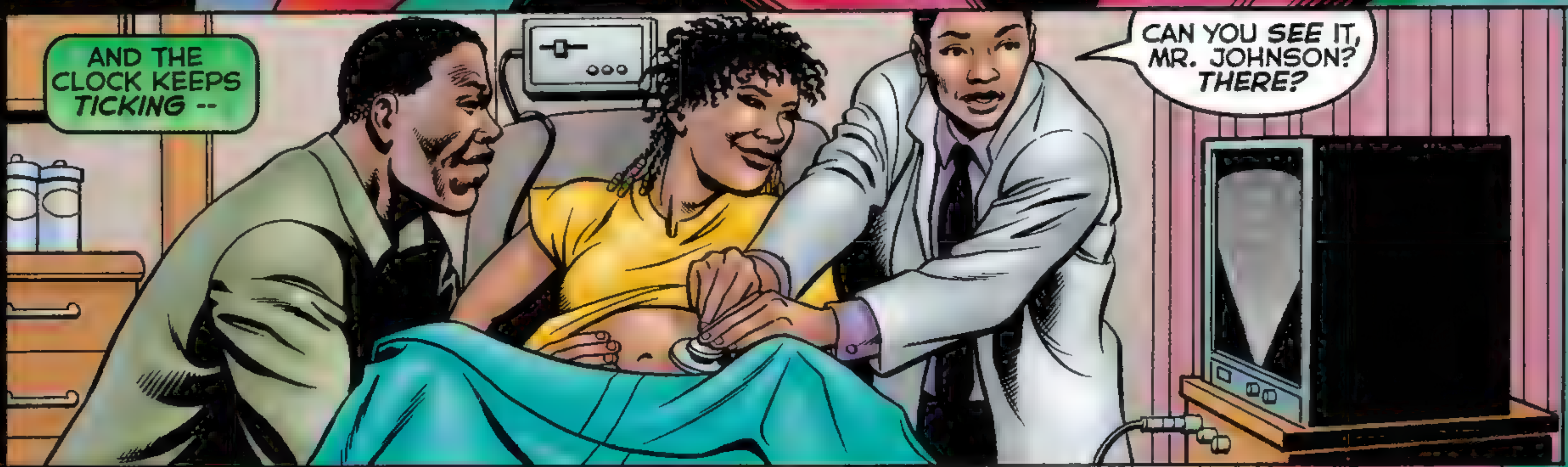
EVEN WHEN MY SON
DOESN'T TURN OUT TO
BE A MONSTER, HE'S
STILL SO HURT BY THE
LOSS OF HIS FATHER --

-- THAT HE'S
GOT TO TRAVEL
THROUGH TIME
JUST TO SEE
ME ONCE. AND I
KNOW -- I KNOW
EXACTLY HOW
HE FEELS.



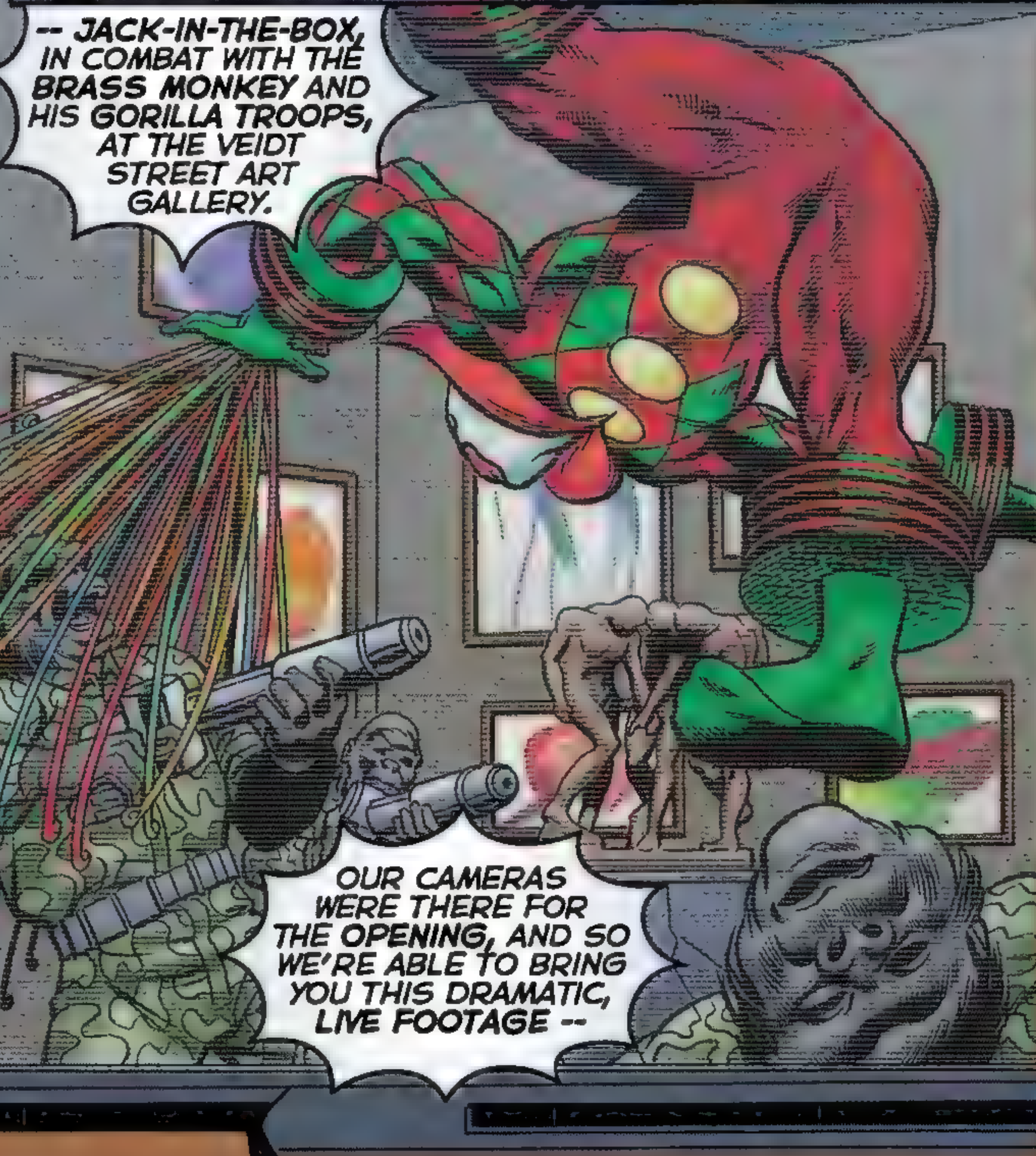
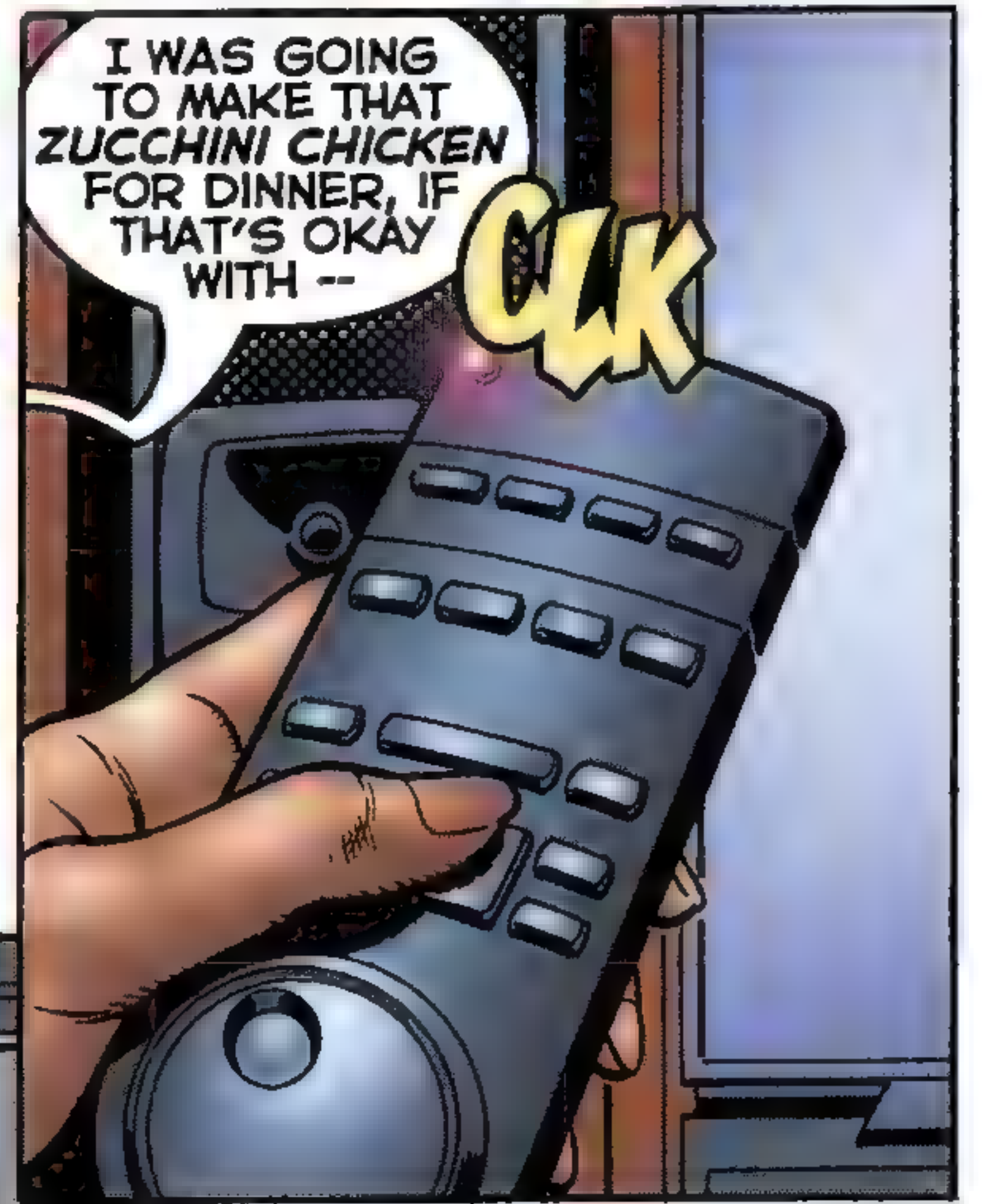
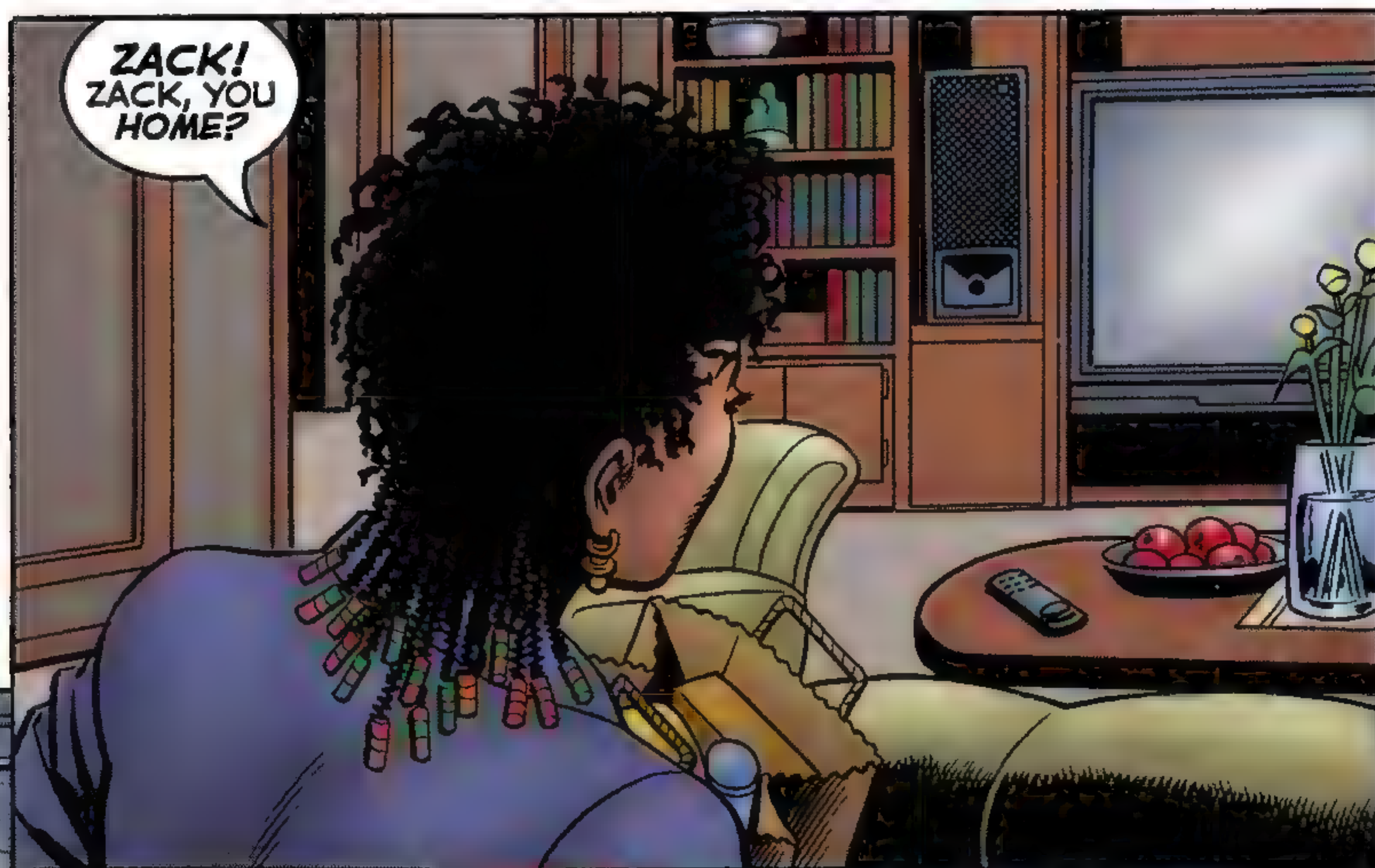
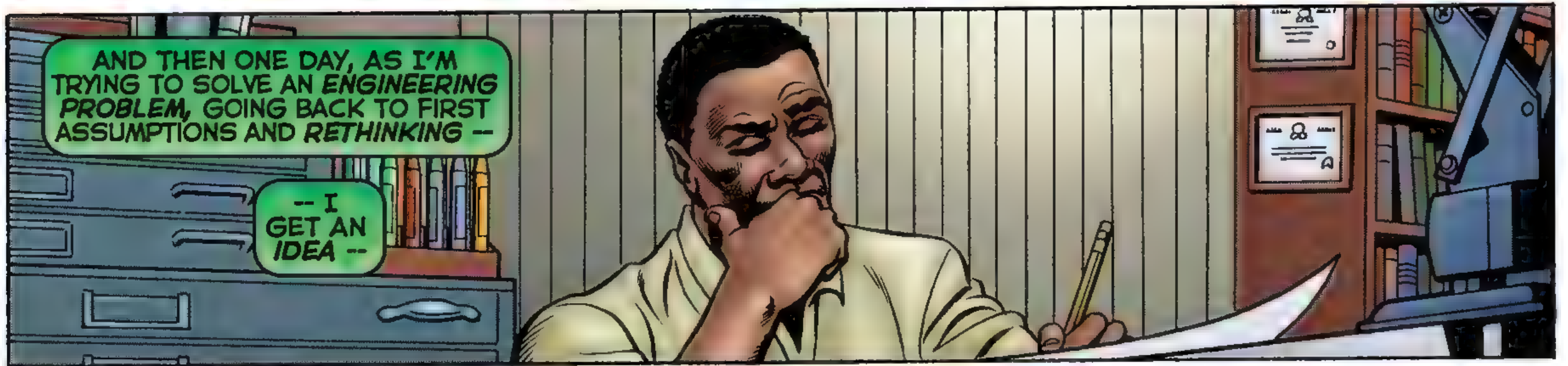
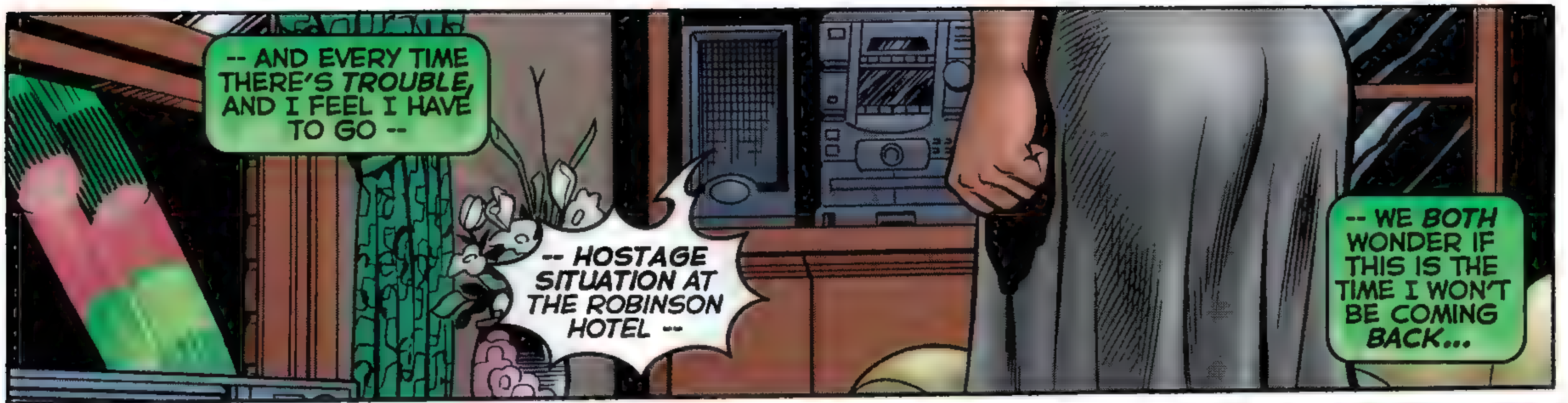
THE NEXT FEW WEEKS GO BADLY.
TAMRA DOESN'T WANT TO
INTERFERE -- SHE'S ALWAYS STAYED
OUT OF MY CHOICES AS JACK --

-- AND I WANT TO
REASSURE HER,
BUT DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO SAY --



AND THE
CLOCK KEEPS
TICKING --

CAN YOU SEE IT,
MR. JOHNSON?
THERE?





TAMRA TOLD ME
ONCE THAT WATCHING
ME ON TV MUST BE
WHAT IT'S LIKE FOR
FOOTBALL WIVES --

-- IF THE
OPPOSING
TEAM HAD
UZIS.

OKAY,
GORILLA BOYS --
YOU'RE GOIN'
DOWN!

YOU BEEN
THROWIN' ME
AROUND
SOME --

BUT THIS TIME,
AS SHE TELLS ME
AFTERWARD, HER
FIRST THOUGHT IS,
"DID THEY DRUG HIM?"
RIGHT FROM HER
FIRST GLIMPSE --



-- LET'S SEE HOW
YOU LIKE GETTING
THROWN -- -- HUH?

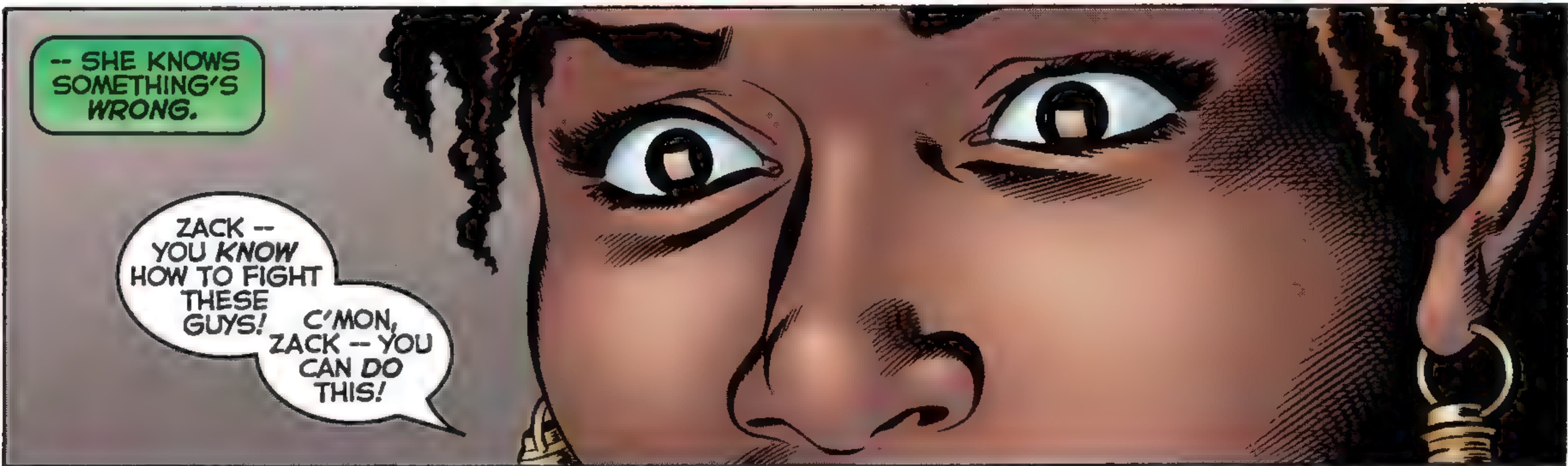
OUR
MASKS
COME OFF,
CLOWN --



-- YOU
OUGHTTA
KNOW THAT
BY NOW!

WHAM
KRAM
BRAM

WHUP
THUDD



-- SHE KNOWS
SOMETHING'S
WRONG.

ZACK --
YOU KNOW
HOW TO FIGHT
THESE
GUYS! C'MON,
ZACK -- YOU
CAN DO
THIS!



NG-AAHHH!

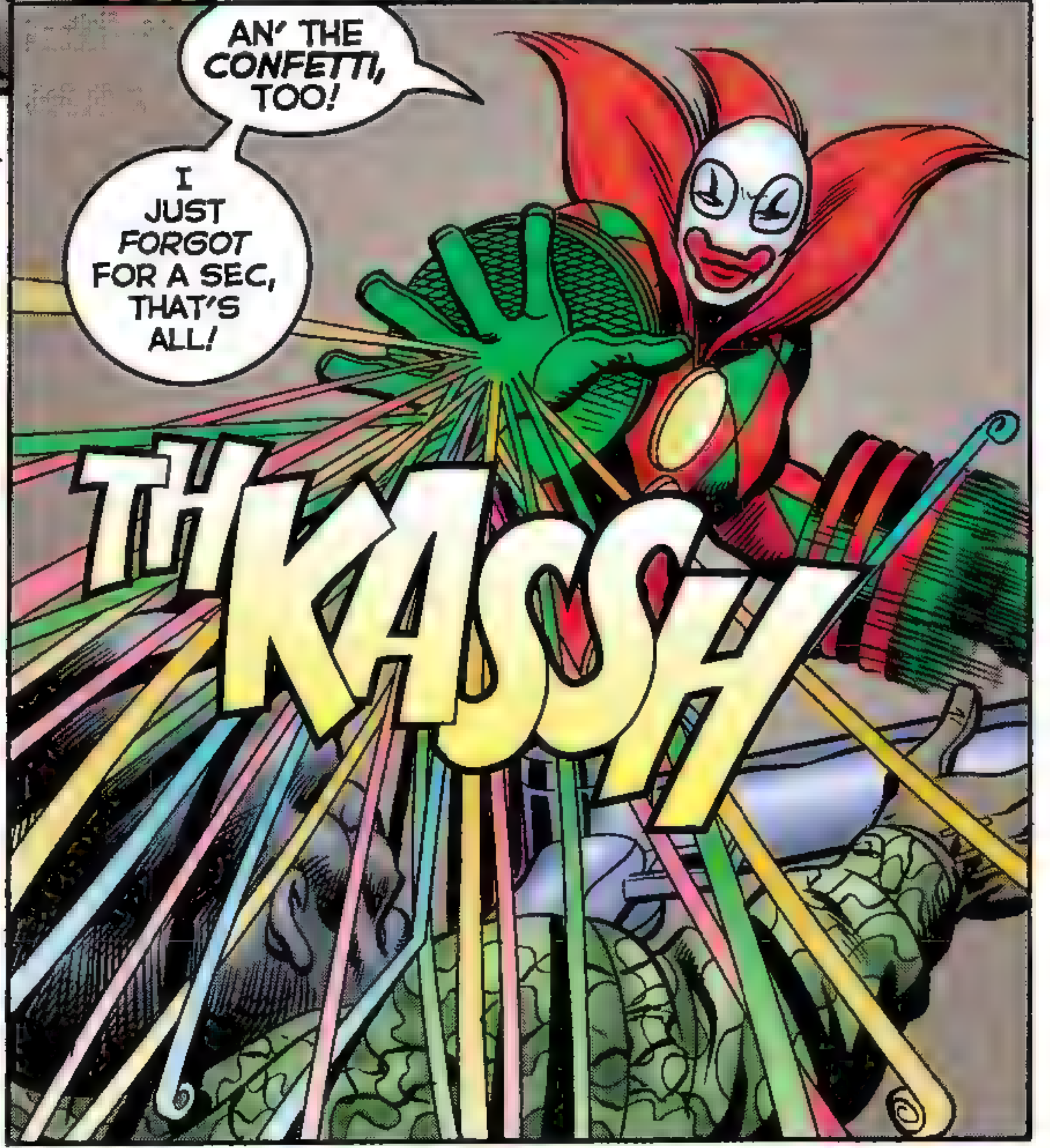
YEAH,
YEAH! I
KNOW!

UNGH!



THE
HANDSPRINGS ---
I'M USIN' 'EM,
SEE?

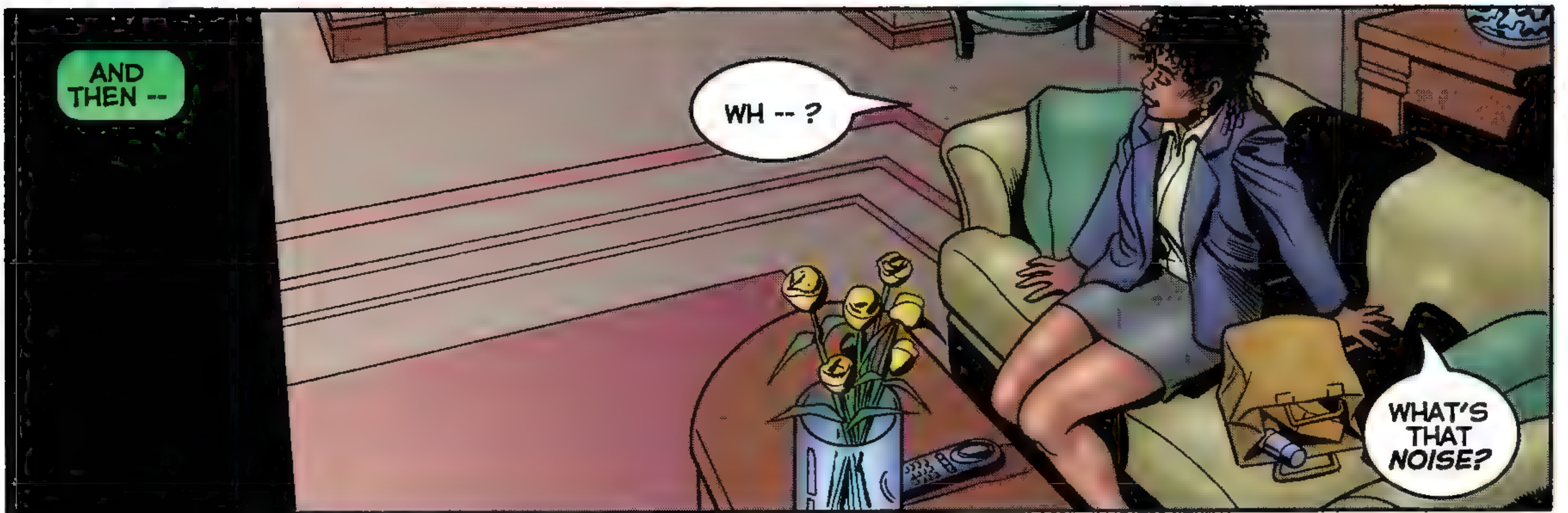
WRAK



AN' THE
CONFETTI,
TOO!

I
JUST
FORGOT
FOR A SEC,
THAT'S
ALL!

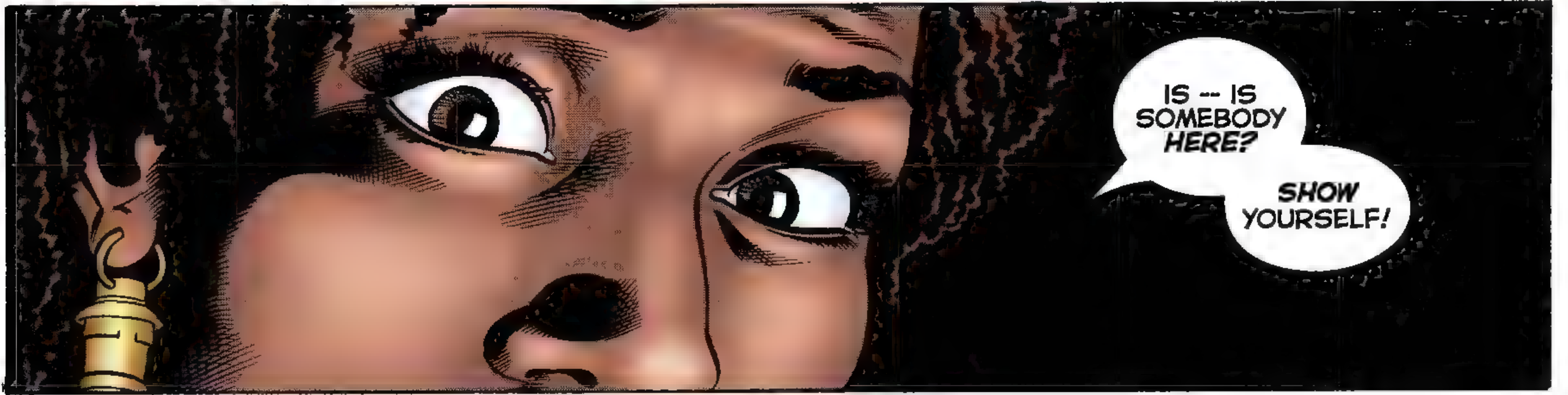
TH
KASH



AND
THEN --

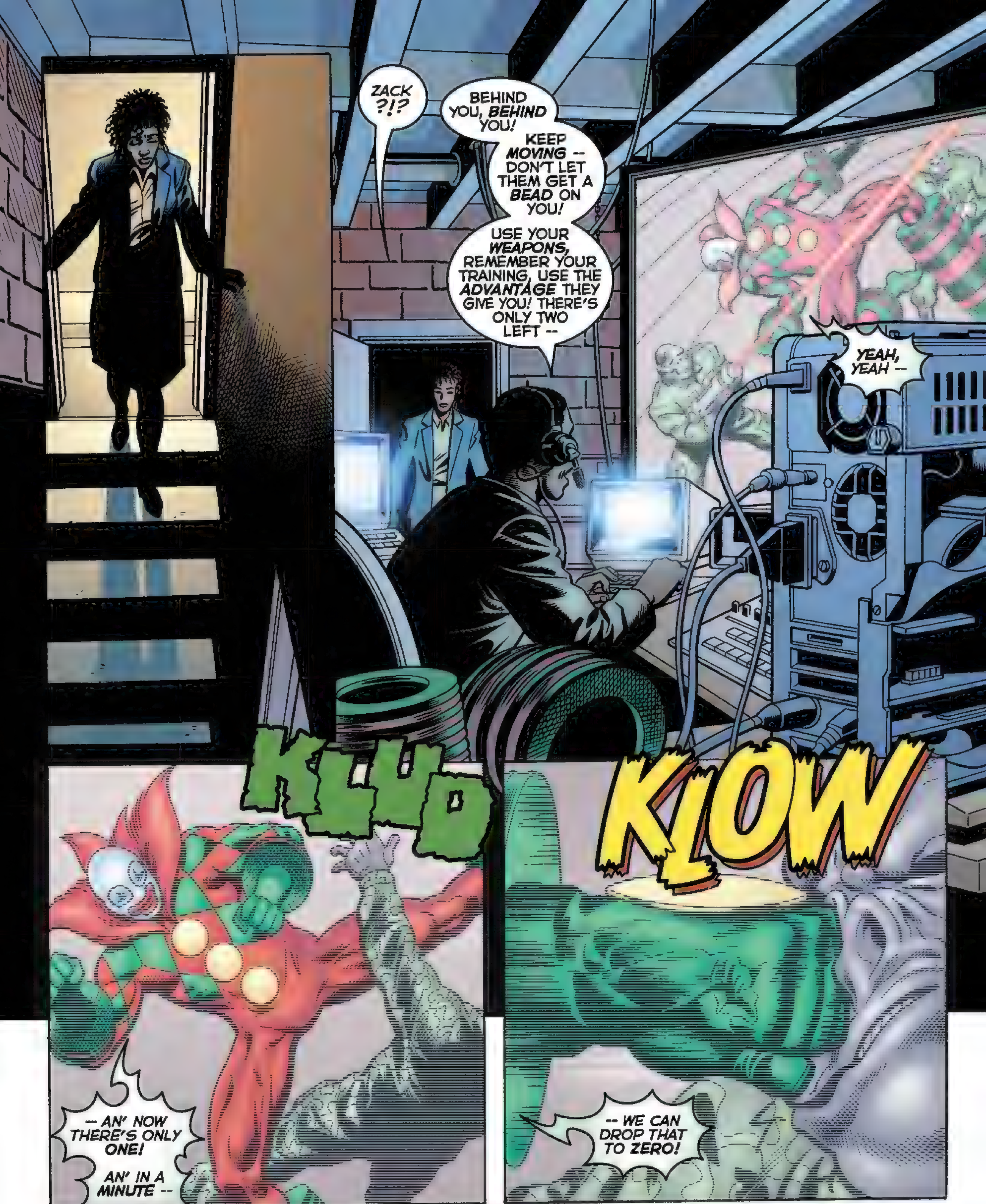
WH -- ?

WHAT'S
THAT
NOISE?



IS -- IS
SOMEBODY
HERE?

SHOW
YOURSELF!



ZACK
?!?

BEHIND
YOU, BEHIND
YOU!

KEEP
MOVING --
DON'T LET
THEM GET A
BEAD ON
YOU!

USE YOUR
WEAPONS,
REMEMBER YOUR
TRAINING, USE THE
ADVANTAGE THEY
GIVE YOU! THERE'S
ONLY TWO
LEFT --

YEAH,
YEAH --

KILL

KLOW

-- AN' NOW
THERE'S ONLY
ONE!

AN' IN A
MINUTE --

-- WE CAN
DROP THAT
TO ZERO!

ZACK --
WHAT'S GOING
ON? YOU SAID
A WHILE AGO
YOU'D HAD AN
IDEA, BUT --

-- WHO IS
THAT OUT
THERE?

"THAT'S ROSCOE,
ROSCOE JAMES."

OKAY,
BRASS
MONKEY --

-- NOW IT'S
YOUR
TURN!

I REALIZED I
WAS LOOKING AT
THE PROJECT
BACKWARDS.

I WASN'T
WILLING TO RISK
LOSING OUR BABY
HIS FATHER -- BUT
JACK-IN-THE-BOX
WAS NEEDED,
TOO.

SO, WELL, WE CAN'T
GET THE BABY A NEW
FATHER, BUT WHAT
ABOUT THE OTHER
SIDE OF THE
EQUATION?

WHAT
ABOUT A NEW
JACK-IN-THE
BOX?

A NEW
-- ?

**NO,
ROSCOE!**

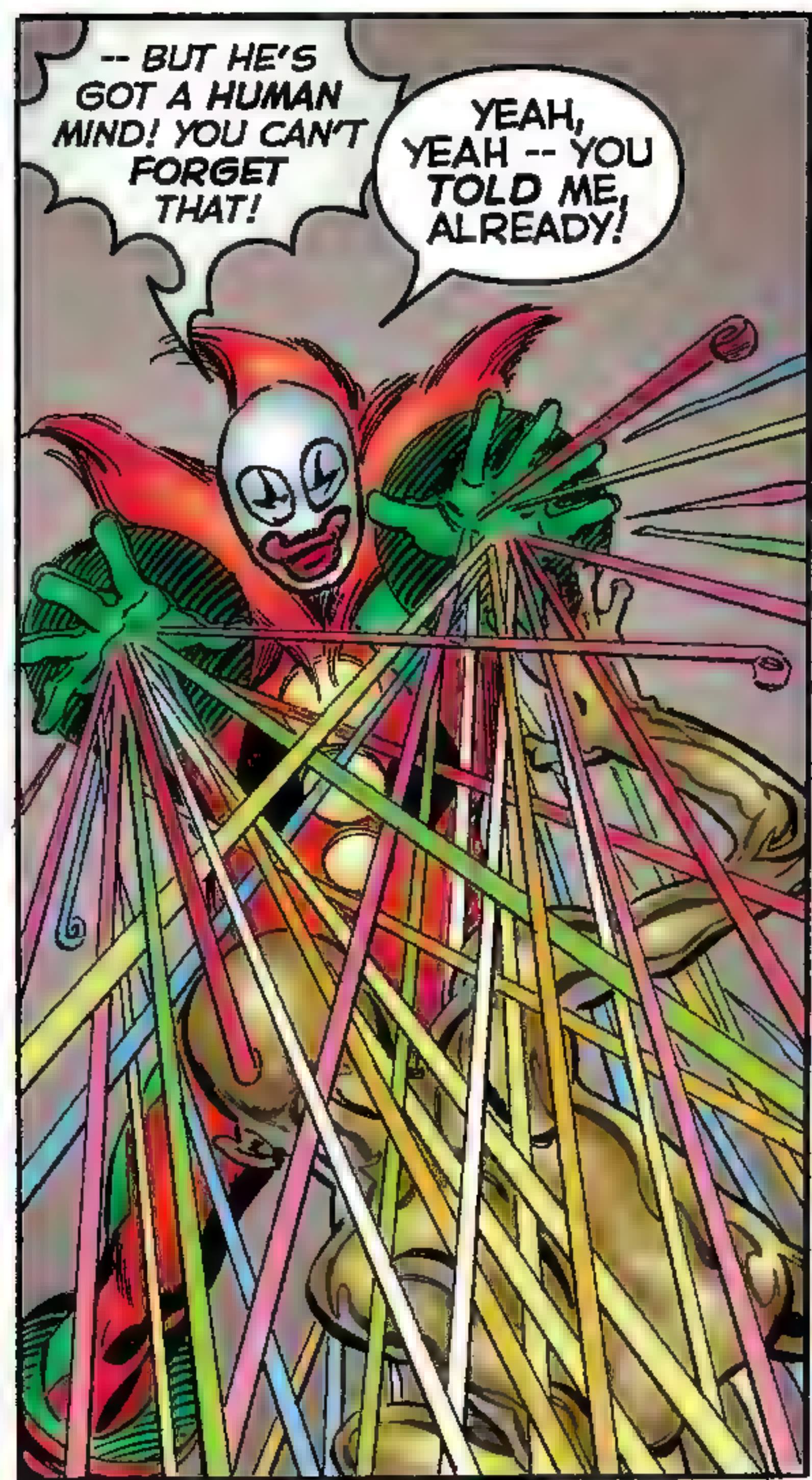
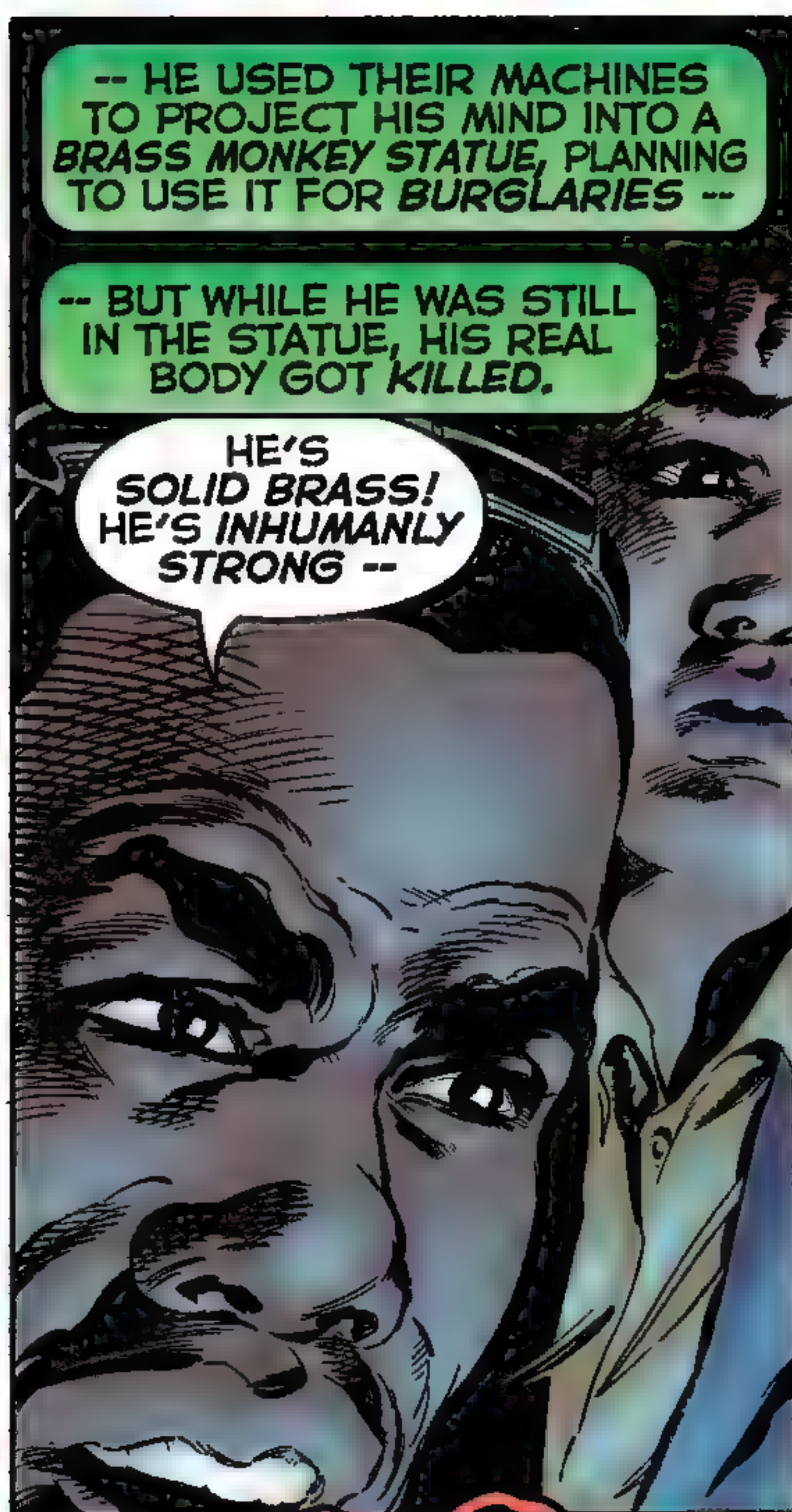
"DON'T
UNDERESTIMATE
HIM!"

SO,
LITTLE
GUY --

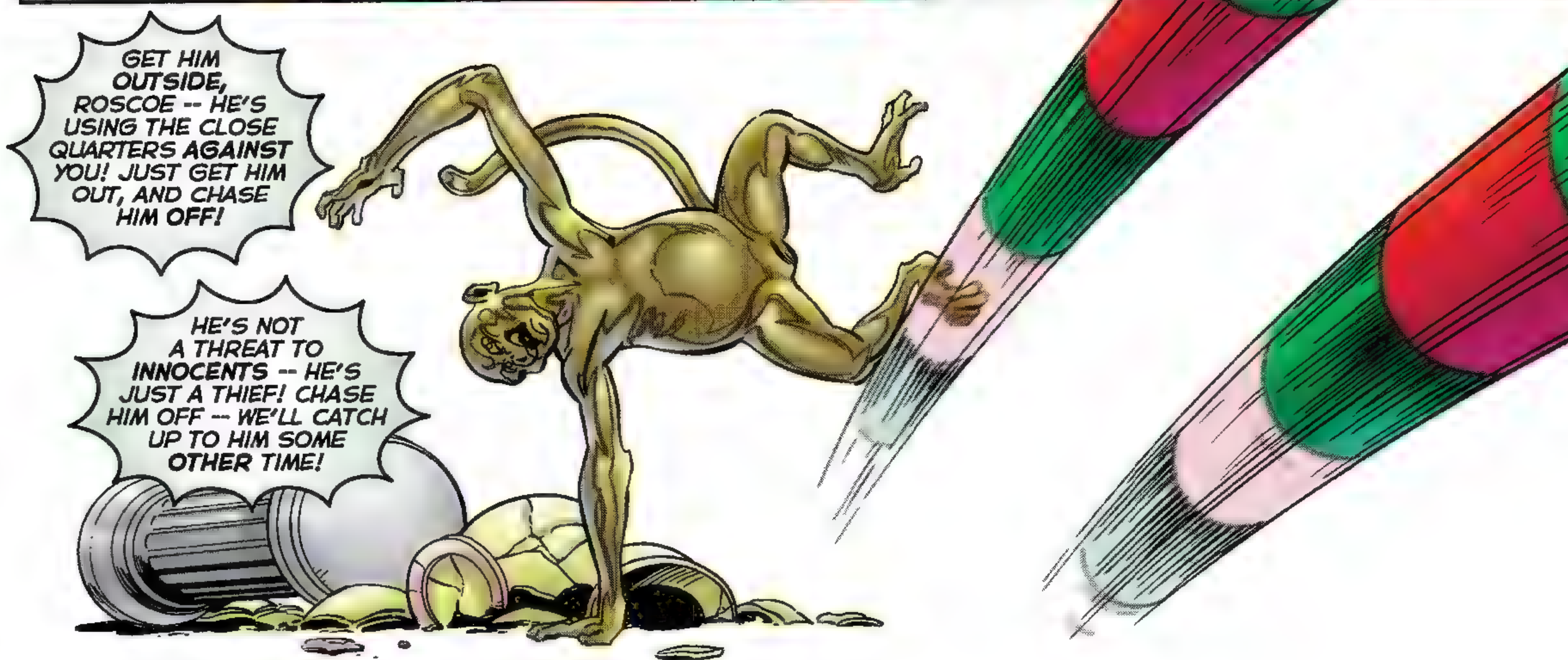
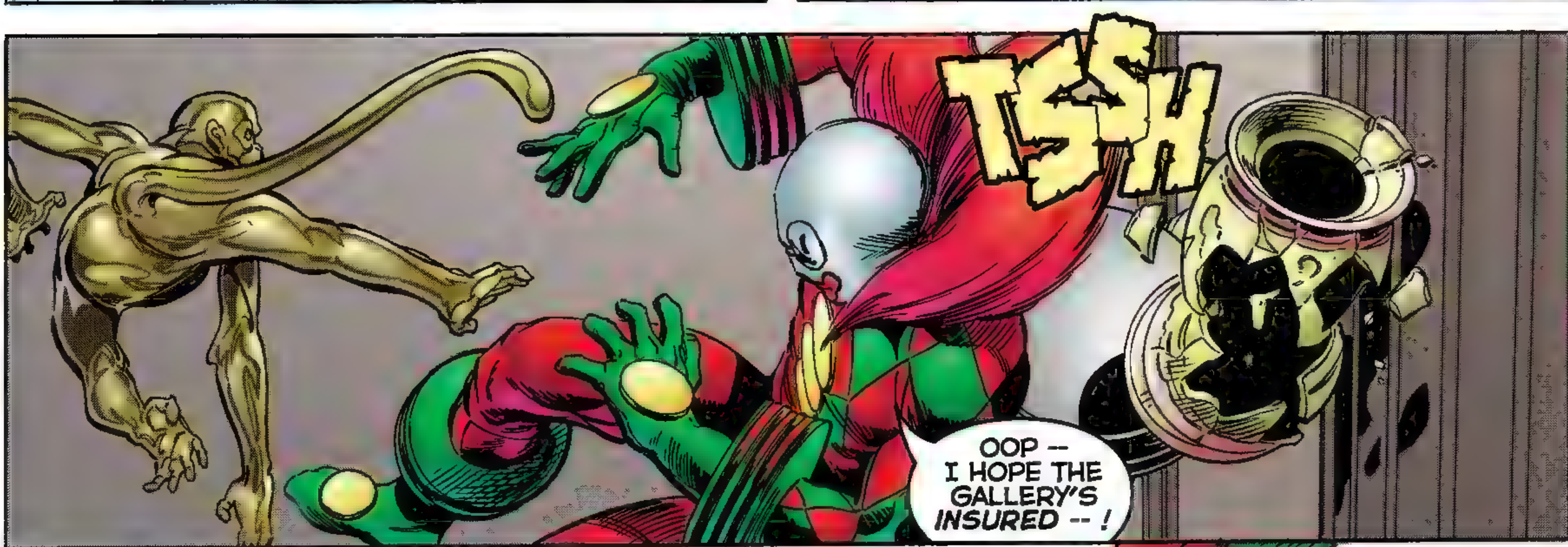
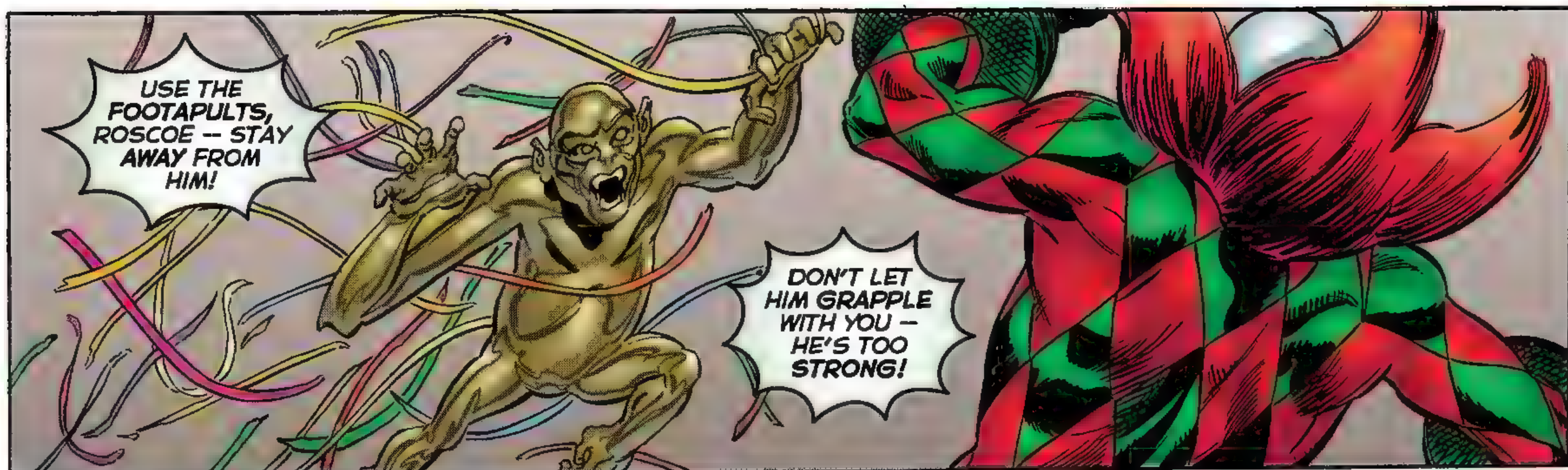
-- YOU'RE
NOT SO
TOUGH --

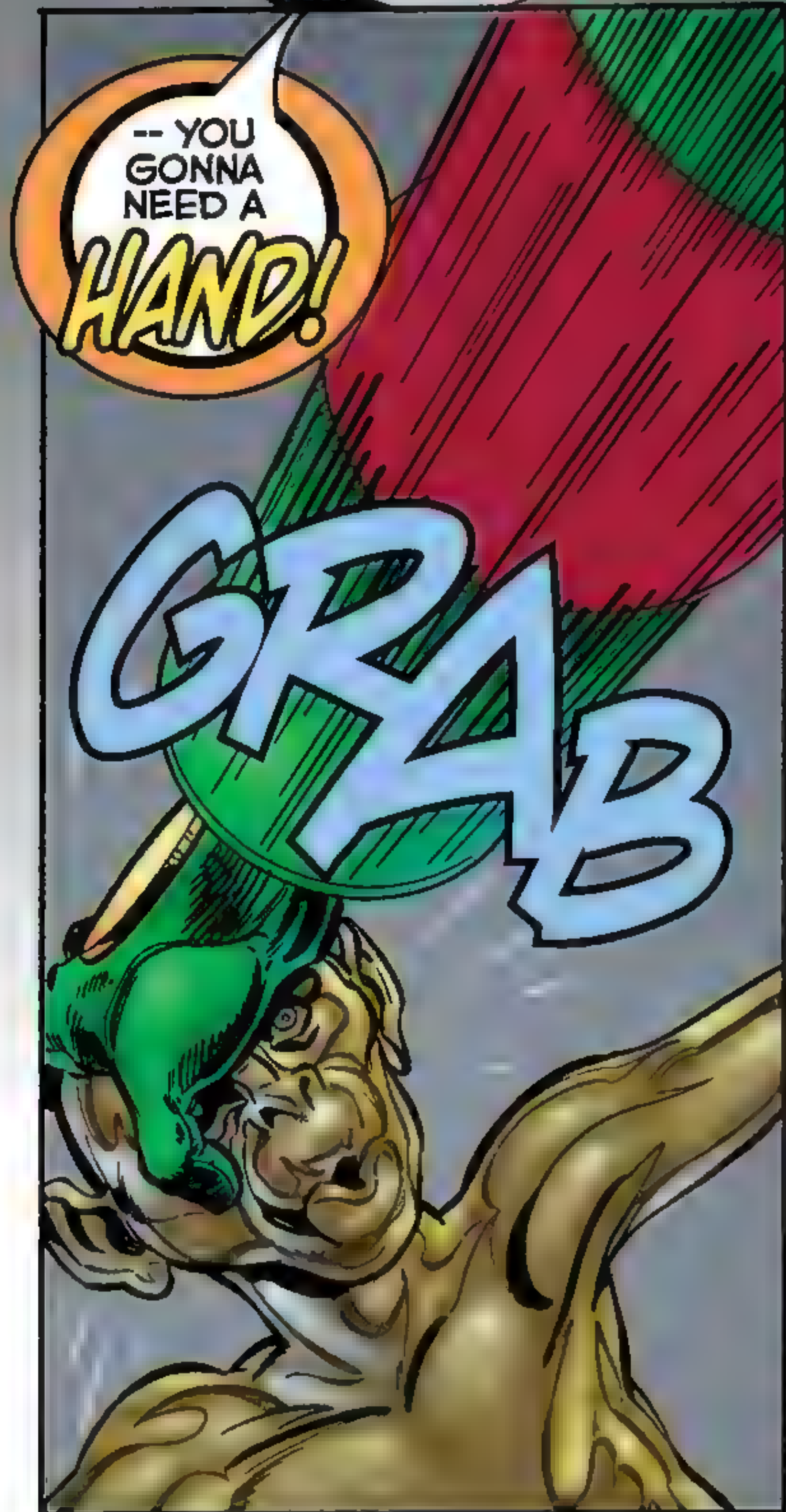
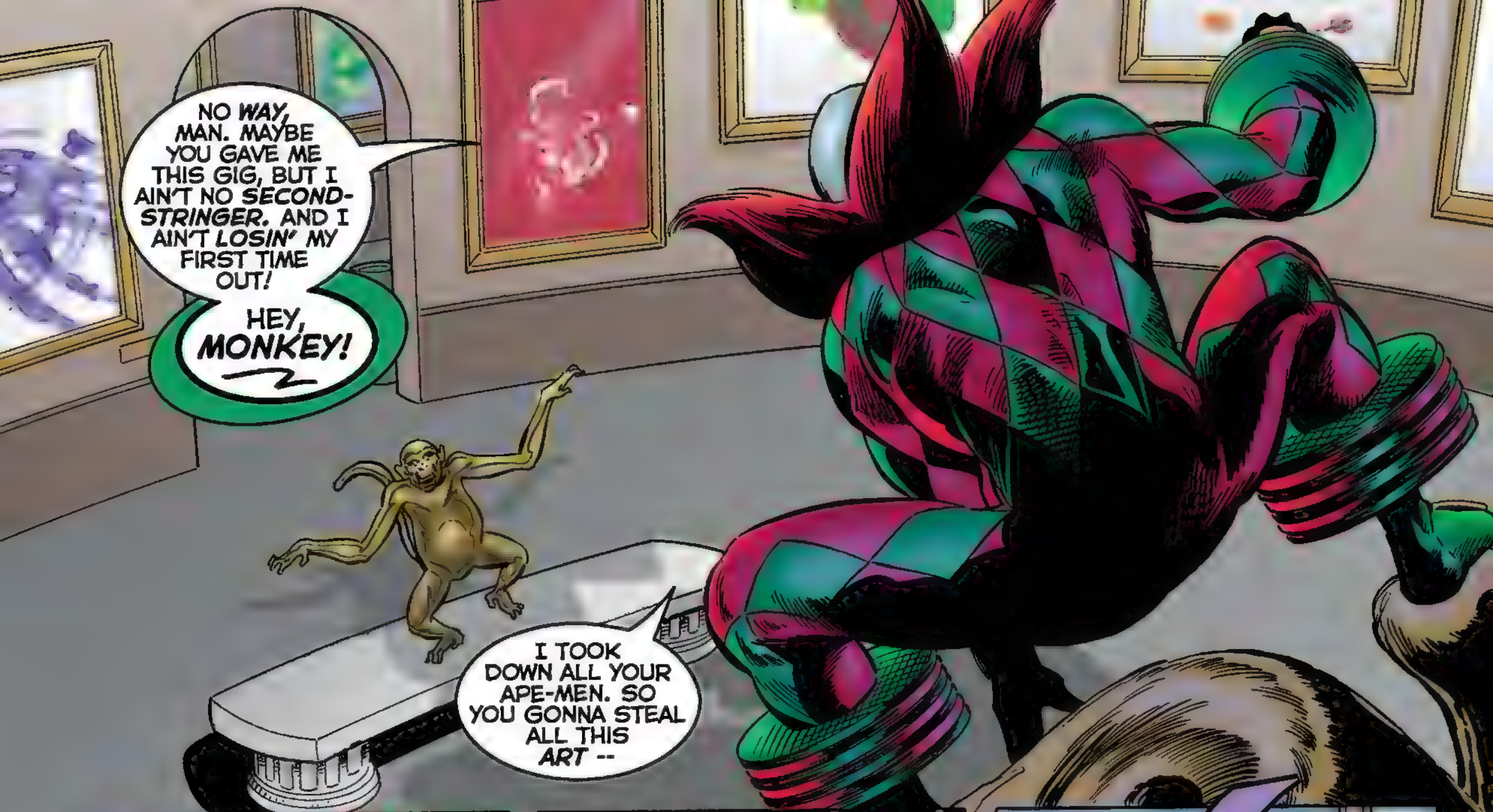


THE MONKEY WAS ORIGINALLY A JANITOR AT A LAB DOING RESEARCH INTO MENTAL TRANSFERENCE --



NOT THAT IT'S GONNA STOP ME, MIND YOU...





-- HE AIN'T
LEAVIN' IT!"

YOU'RE A
SAPHEAD,
JACK-IN-THE-BOX!
YOU THOUGHT
THAT'D HURT
ME?

YOU KNOW
HOW FAST I
AM! I BOUNCED
OFF THE WALL,
LANDED SAFELY IN
THIS DUMPSTER --
AND DIDN'T EVEN
GET A DENT!

FINE
WITH ME,
MONKEY --



-- DUMPSTER'S
RIGHT WHERE
I WANTED
YOU!

MAYBE YOU
CAN RIP THROUGH
CONFETTI USUALLY,
BUT PACKED UP LIKE
THAT, WITH NOTHIN' TO
BRACE YOURSELF
AGAINST --

-- I'M
BETTIN'
YOU CAN'T
DIG YOURSELF
OUT REAL
FAST!

AND THAT'S IT. THE
MONKEY THRASHES
AROUND A LITTLE, THEN
LIES STILL, NO DOUBT
SEETHING WITH RAGE.



AND I'M THINKING HOW NONE OF 'EM -- NONE OF MY "BOYS" -- SAID ANYTHING LIKE THIS.

MAYBE THIS IS THE CHANGE WE NEEDED. MAYBE THE BABY HAS A CHANCE NOW. AND ROSCOE --

COPS! I BETTER --

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT, ROSCOE --

-- THEY'RE HERE FOR THE BRASS MONKEY, NOT YOU. YOU'RE THE HERO, REMEMBER?

AND YOU DID GOOD. REAL GOOD.

HUH.

YEAH, I GUESS I DID, DIDN'T I?

SO WHEN DO WE GO AFTER THE DEACON, HUH?

NOT RIGHT AWAY, ROSCOE. BUT WE'LL DO IT -- IN TIME.

I'VE GOT TO ADMIT, I HAD MY DOUBTS. HE TOOK TO THE TRAINING LIKE HE'D BEEN WAITING FOR IT ALL HIS LIFE. BUT STILL --

-- THERE'S A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN EXERCISE AND REAL BULLETS.

BUT HE DID JUST FINE. NOT WHAT I'D HAVE DONE, MAYBE, BUT FINE NONETHELESS. I BREATHE A SIGH OF RELIEF --

-- AND SEND THE 'RETURN' COMMAND TO THE DOODLEBUG.

AND TAMRA GETS THIS LOOK IN HER EYE...



YOU REALIZE YOU JUST TOOK ON AN **ADOPTIVE SON** -- EVEN BEFORE THE **REAL** ONE'S HERE.

IF THAT'S WHAT IT **TAKES**, HONEY.

AND ROSCOE'S A **GOOD KID** -- HE DESERVES A CHANCE. THIS IS KIND OF AN **EXTREME** CHANCE, TRUE, BUT --



IT'S GOING TO BE A LOT OF **WORK**. YOU SURE IT'S THE RIGHT **THING**?

NO, I'M **NOT**.

FOR ALL I KNOW, THIS COULD BE THE **EXACT** STEP THAT'LL CREATE ONE OF THOSE **FUTURES** -- OR SOMETHING **WORSE**.



BUT IT'S THE **BEST** I CAN **THINK** OF. AND IN THE **END** --

-- ISN'T THAT HOW IT WORKS FOR ANY **PARENT**?



HAVE I TOLD YOU RECENTLY HOW MUCH I **LOVE** YOU?

SEEMS TO ME I'VE **HEARD** IT A TIME OR TWO, YEAH. BUT I'M NOT **TIRED** OF IT. C'MERE.



YOU ARE NOW LEAVING **ASTRO CITY** PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY







HER NAME IS
MIRANDA.

SHE HAS A LOW, THROATY LAUGH,
AND CAPPED TOOTH FROM A
BICYCLE ACCIDENT WHEN SHE
WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD.

HER SHAMPOO MAKES HER
HAIR SMELL LIKE APPLES
AND WILDFLOWERS.



AND HE HAS
NEVER MET
HER.

BUT ALMOST
EVERY NIGHT --
WHEN HE FALLS
ASLEEP -

-- SHE'S
THERE.

AND SHE'S SO CLOSE,
AND SO TENDER --
AND HER HEAD RESTS
IN THE HOLLOW OF HIS
NECK IN THAT OLD
FAMILIAR WAY --



-- AND THEN
SHE'S GONE --

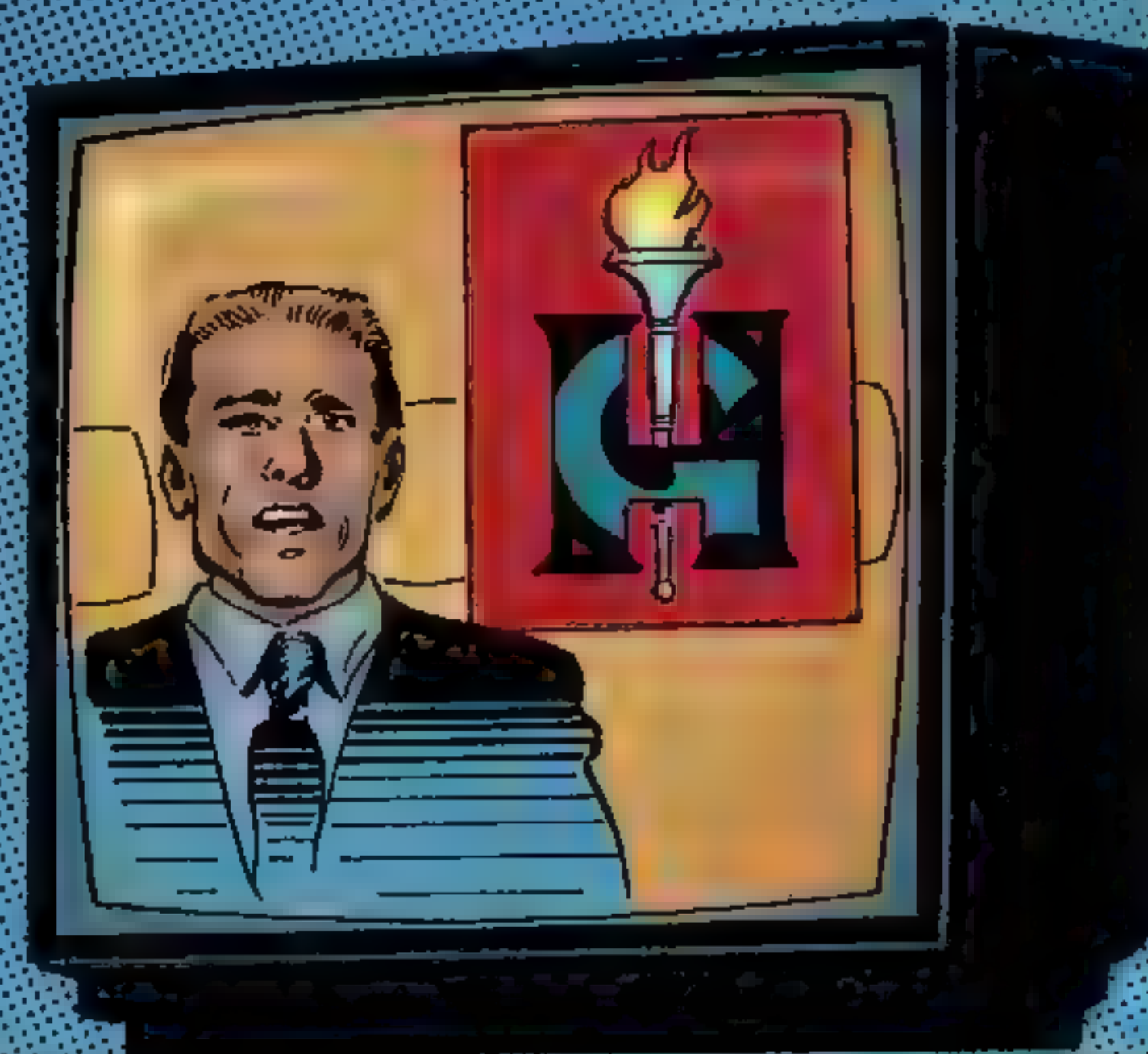


-- AND MICHAEL TENICEK
CAN FORGET ABOUT
SLEEP FOR THE REST
OF THE NIGHT.



HE'S NEVER MET HER. HE
KNOWS HE'S NEVER MET HER.

-- MEMBERS
OF HONOR GUARD
CAPTURED THE SELF-STYLED
CONQUERLORD TODAY AT
THE U.N. BUILDING
IN NEW YORK --



SO HOW DOES HE KNOW
SHE BITES HER FINGERNAILS?
HOW DOES HE KNOW SHE
LIKES ROASTED GARLIC
ON HER PIZZA?

HOW DOES HE
KNOW THE LITTLE
SOUNDS SHE
MAKES IN HER
SLEEP?

BUS
STOP
ACTA
ROUTE

41

SO WHY CAN'T
HE GET HER OUT
OF HIS MIND?

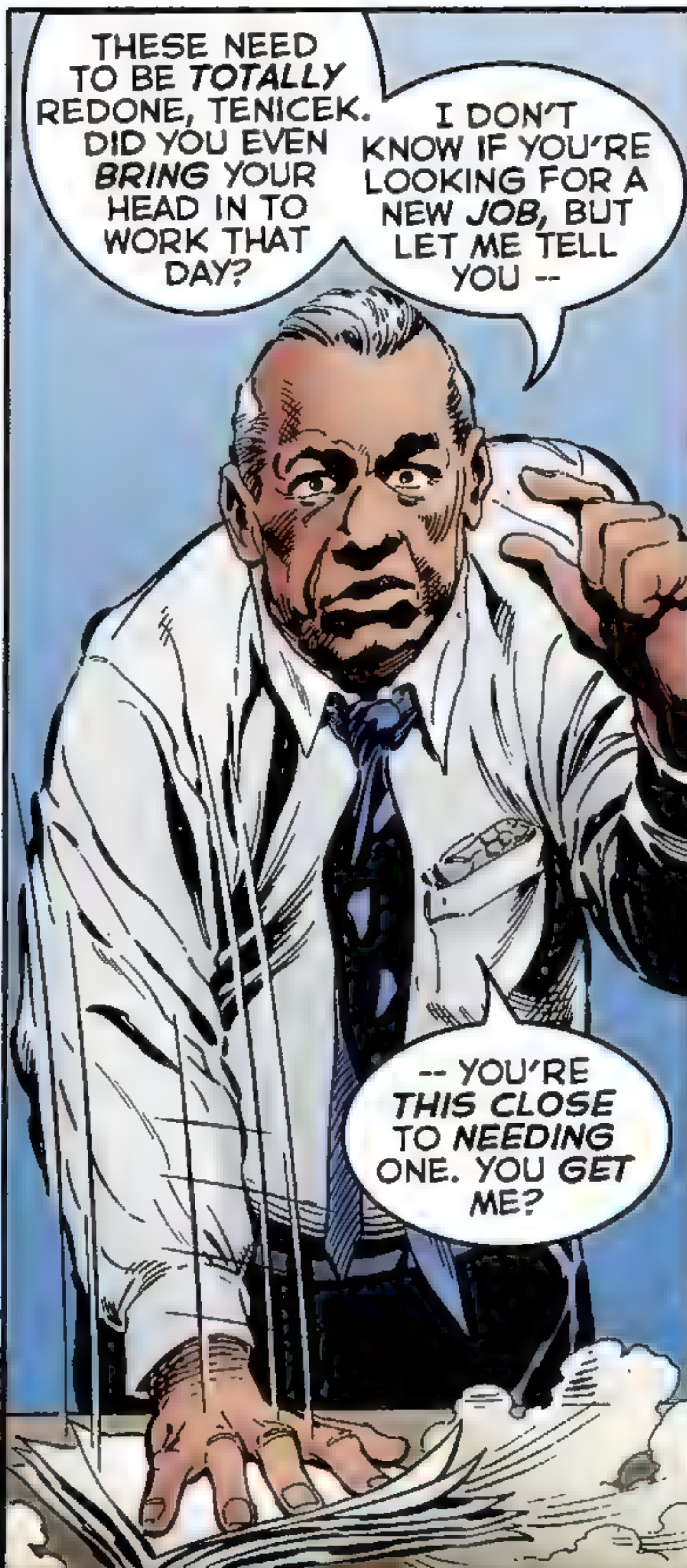
THE NEARNESS YOU OR



MIKE!
EARTH TO
MIKE!

HAVE YOU HEARD A
WORD I'VE SAID,
MIKE? YOU LOOK
AWFUL!

YOU'VE
GOT TO GET
SOME SLEEP,
MAN...



THESE NEED
TO BE TOTALLY
REDONE, TENICEK.
DID YOU EVEN
BRING YOUR
HEAD IN TO
WORK THAT
DAY?

I DON'T
KNOW IF YOU'RE
LOOKING FOR A
NEW JOB, BUT
LET ME TELL
YOU --

-- YOU'RE
THIS CLOSE
TO NEEDING
ONE. YOU GET
ME?



I DON'T
KNOW WHY I
BOTHERED.
EVERYONE SAYS
YOU'RE A FLAKE,
BUT YOU SEEMED
LIKE A NICE
GUY.

A WORD
OF ADVICE,
THE NEXT TIME
YOU ASK SOMEONE
TO DINNER?
SHOW UP.



IT USED TO BE
KIND OF NICE,
WHEN IT ONLY
HAPPENED ONCE
EVERY COUPLE OF
MONTHS OR SO.

A MYSTERY GIRL. HIS "DREAM
GIRL," HE CALLED HER TO
HIMSELF. BUT THAT WAS
BEFORE IT WAS ONCE A WEEK.
THEN TWICE. THEN --



AND IT'S NOT EVEN
LIKE SHE'S HIS TYPE --
OR WHAT HE ALWAYS
THOUGHT WAS HIS TYPE.

SHE'S NOT THE
KIND OF WOMAN
WHO TURNS HIS
HEAD ON THE
STREET. NOT
WHAT HE'D
PICK, IF YOU
ASKED HIM.



BUT STILL -- HE GOES TO SLEEP --

-- AND HE'S SEEN THAT SMILE A MILLION TIMES. HE KNOWS JUST HOW SHE LIKES TO HAVE HER NECK RUBBED.

HE KNOWS SO MUCH ABOUT HER --



-- AND IT'S TERRIFYING.

IS HE CRACKING UP? IS HE GOING INSANE? FOR GOD'S SAKE, WHAT COMES NEXT?



HE KNOWS HE'S NEVER MET HER. HE KNOWS.

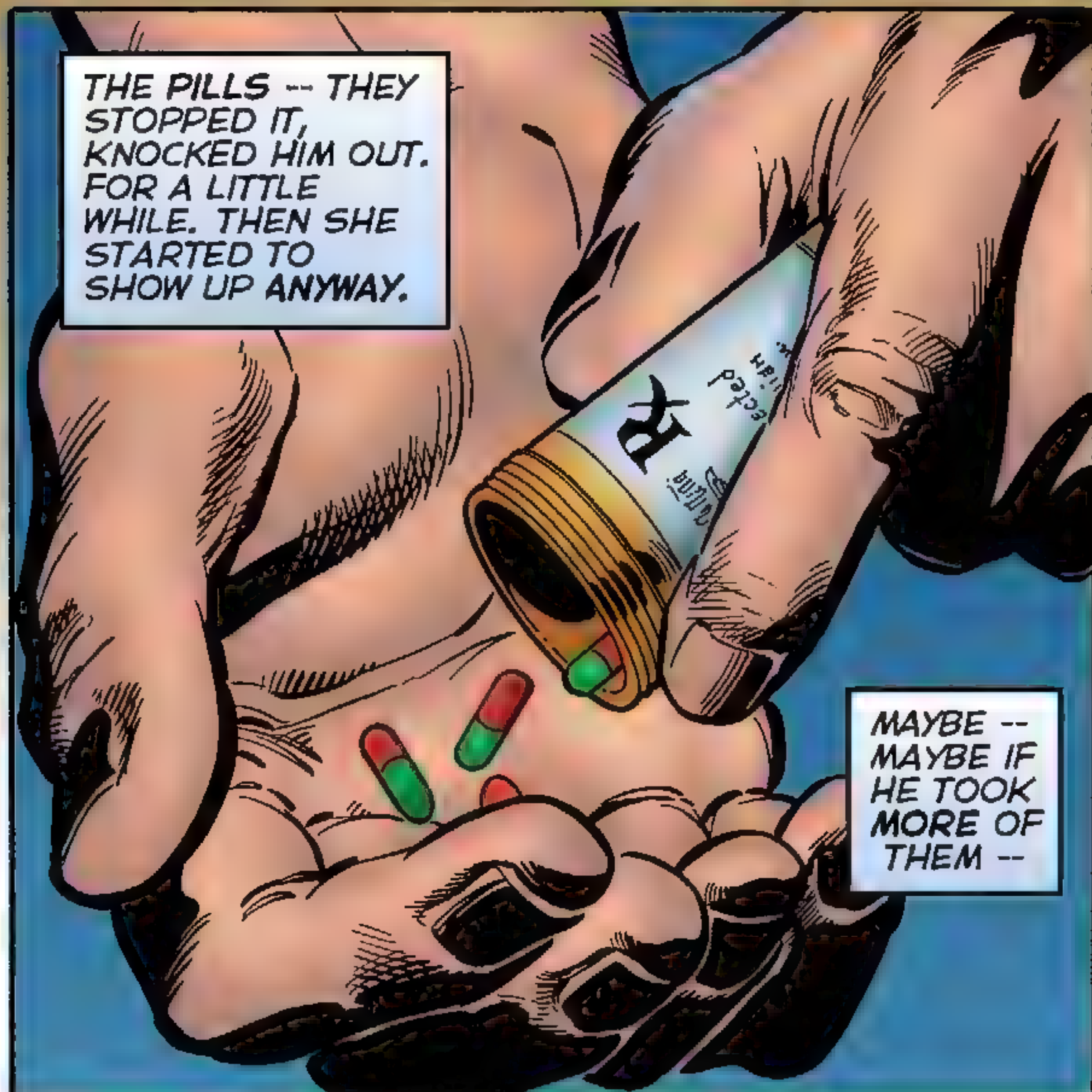
MOM?
HI. NO, I'M GOOD, I'M FINE.

LISTEN, MOM --




-- DO YOU REMEMBER A GIRL NAMED MIRANDA?

MAYBE A COUPLE OF YEARS YOUNGER THAN ME? SHORT DARK HAIR? REALLY LIGHT FRECKLES ACROSS THE BRIDGE OF HER NOSE?



-- NOISE?






TH-THE
HANGED
MAN?!

BUT
Y-YOU NEVER
LEAVE SHADOW
HILL -- !


I GO WHERE I AM NEEDED, MICHAEL
TENICK. AND TONIGHT, ONE OF
THE PLACES I AM NEEDED IS HERE.



HE DOES NOT HEAR
THE WORDS. RATHER,
THEY SIMPLY APPEAR
IN HIS MIND --

HERE -- ?

-- NOT SO MUCH
SPOKEN AS
INSCRIBED.



YOUR DREAMS
TROUBLE YOU.
AND IN TURN
THEY TROUBLE
REALITY.

YOU FEAR YOU
ARE GOING MAD.
YOU ARE NOT.



HERE....



HEY --
WHAT --



...I SHALL
SHOW YOU.

AND
SUDDENLY --

-- IT'S 1943, IN THE
FIRST NATIONAL BANK
ON NOVICK AVENUE --

VERY GOOD --
THEY'RE FROZEN
STOCK-STILL
IN TIME!

TO WORK, MY
TEMPUS FUGITIVES --
TIME WAITS FOR
NO MAN!

HOLD IT!

TIME-KEEPER!
I'LL HAVE TO SEE
YOUR O.P.A. BANK-
ROBBERY COUPON
BOOK!

RATIONING,
YOU KNOW!

THE
ALL-AMERICAN!

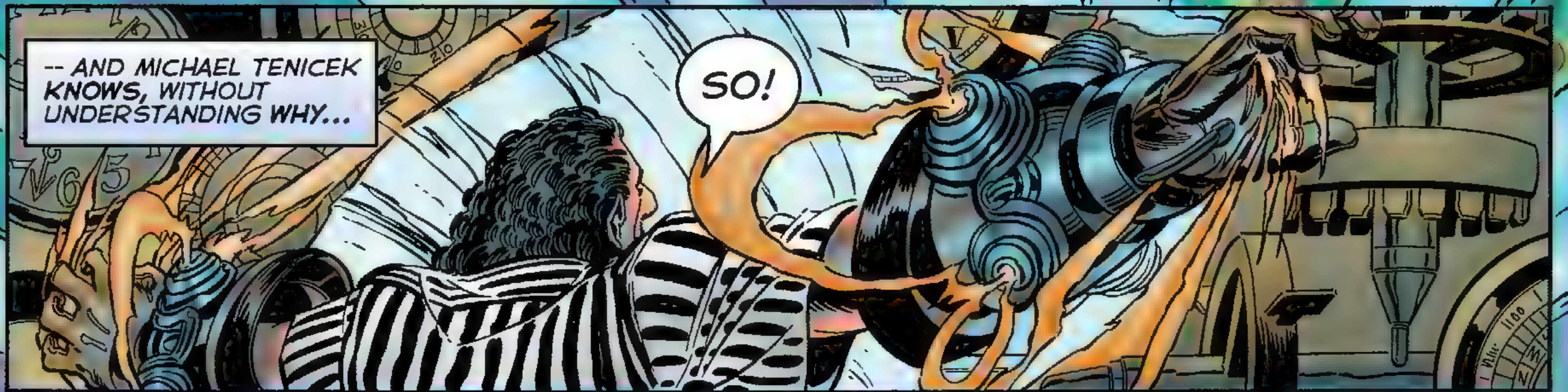
AND
DON'T FORGET
SLUGGER, THE
JUNIOR
DYNAMO!

WE
CAPTURED
ONE OF YOUR
MEN'S CHRONO-
PACKS, BUSTER --
AND DUPLICATED
YOUR TIME-FIELD!
AND THAT
MEANS --

-- YOUR
TIME'S
UP!

KSH





-- AND MICHAEL TENICEK KNOWS, WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WHY...

SO!

EH?
WHO ARE
YOU?

I AM
ETERNEON,
LORD OF
TIME.

GO
BACK, LITTLE
HUMAN. YOU ARE
DISTURBING MY DOMAIN --
WIELDING FORCES YOU
CANNOT HOPE TO
COMPREHEND.

I
DON'T
CARE!

I'VE
SHATTERED THE
TIME-BARRIER --
BROKEN THROUGH INTO
THE CHRONAL REALM!
I HAVE POWER, AND
I WON'T GIVE
IT UP!

...THAT THE
PATTERNS OF
TIME CAN BE
REWOVEN AND
ALTERED --

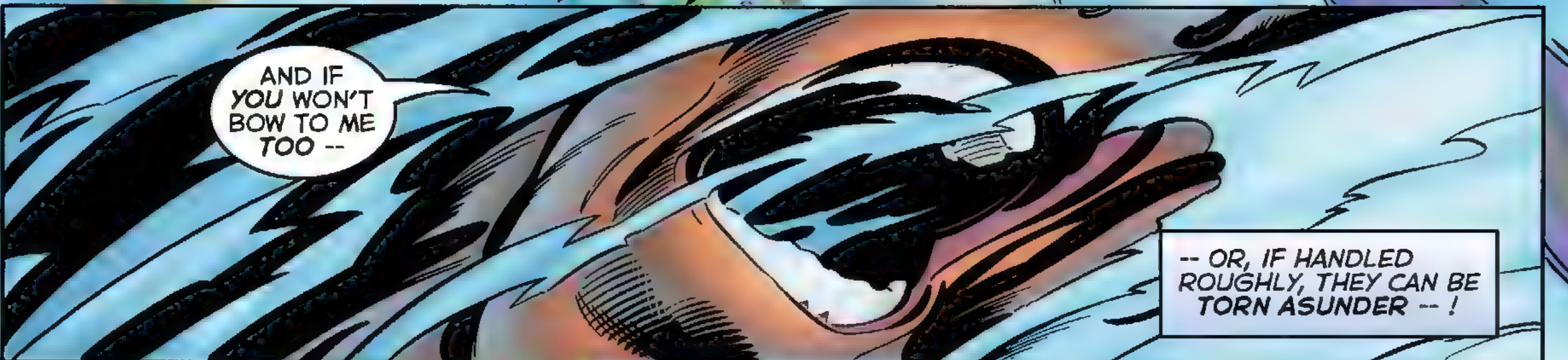


I'M NOT
GOING TO BE
A NOTHING
ANYMORE!

I'M
NOT GOING
TO BE A
LOSER!



I'VE BROKEN
TIME! I'VE BENT
IT TO MY
WILL!



AND IF
YOU WON'T
BOW TO ME
TOO --

-- OR, IF HANDLED
ROUGHLY, THEY CAN BE
TORN ASUNDER -- !

-- I'LL
KILL
YOU --!

HE FEELS THE POWER OF
THE TIME-STORM THEIR
BATTLE TRIGGERS --

-- SEES THE BEGINNING
AND END OF THE STRUGGLE
SIMULTANEOUSLY --

-- SEES THE TIME-KEEPER
ATTACK EVEN AS HE SEES
HIM, BROKEN AND INSANE,
HURLED BACK TO HIS
ORIGINAL ERA --

-- AND SEES TIME AND
REALITY FRAGMENT
FROM THE VIOLENCE
DONE TO IT --

-- SEES THE WORLD
THROWN INTO CHAOS --

HEY,
ROVER!
UP
HERE!

-- ALL ERAS
COLLAPSING,
ENTANGLING
WITH EACH
OTHER --

NOT
VIKINGS.
TELL ME
IT'S NOT
VIKINGS...

HE SEES
HEROES
UNMADE --

SAMARITAN!

-- AND
WORSE --

ASTRO
CITY --

-- IT'S
DISAPPEAR-
ING!

-- AND HE SEES THE
LAST, DESPERATE
BATTLE -- THE
VICTORIOUS BATTLE --

-- TO REWEAVE
TIME -- TO UNDO
THE DAMAGE --

-- AND TO SET
ALL, ONCE MORE,
TO RIGHTS.

WHEN...
WHEN DID
THIS ALL
HAPPEN?

YESTERDAY. FIVE DECADES
AGO. DOES IT MATTER?

I...
UNDERSTAND,
I THINK.

SHE DIED,
DIDN'T SHE? I
KNEW HER, AND SHE
DIED IN THAT... THAT
MAELSTROM...

SHE WAS
YOUR WIFE.
AND SHE
NEVER
EXISTED.

THE CHRONAL
RECONSTRUCTION
WAS NOT EXACT.

MY...
WIFE?

AIR ACE FIRST BATTLED THE BARNSTORMERS
ON A SUNDAY, NOT A MONDAY... AND AS
A RESULT, HER GRANDPARENTS NEVER MET.

FOR THE MOST PART, THE NEW
REALITY IS A WHOLE. BUT CLOSE
BONDS SUCH AS YOURS... THEY
CREATE A WEAKNESS IN THE
FABRIC OF TIME...

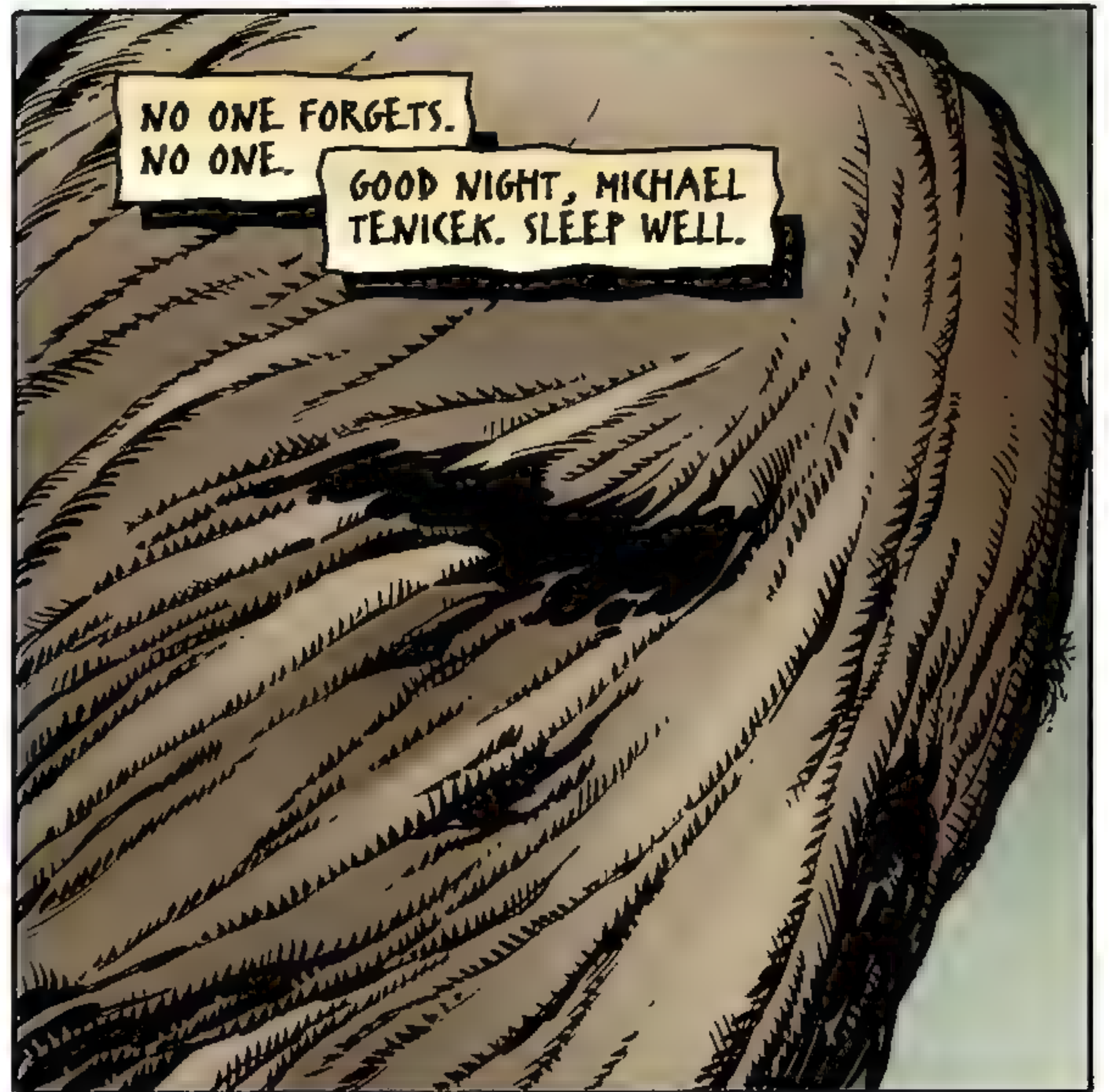
...ONE THAT COULD LET
THROUGH... DANGEROUS
THINGS. BUT THE WEAK-
NESS IS HEALED BY
YOUR UNDERSTANDING.

I CANNOT RETURN
HER TO YOU... THAT
IS BEYOND EVEN MY
POWER. BUT IF THE
PAIN IS TOO MUCH...

... I CAN
ALLOW YOU
TO FORGET...

FORGET
HER?

I...
UH...





AND MICHAEL TENICEK
SLEEPS, WITHOUT
DRUGS OR FEAR --



-- AND THE DREAMS
COME. THE DREAMS
OF MIRANDA.

HE KNEW HER. HE
KNOWS THAT. IN
ANOTHER TIME,
ANOTHER WORLD --
HE KNEW HER.

AND HE
LOVED
HER.

AND THAT
MAKES ALL THE
DIFFERENCE.



YOU ARE
NOW LEAVING
**ASTRO
CITY**
PLEASE DRIVE
CAREFULLY



**AND
DON'T
MISS...**

BUSIEK & PACHECO Arrowsmith™

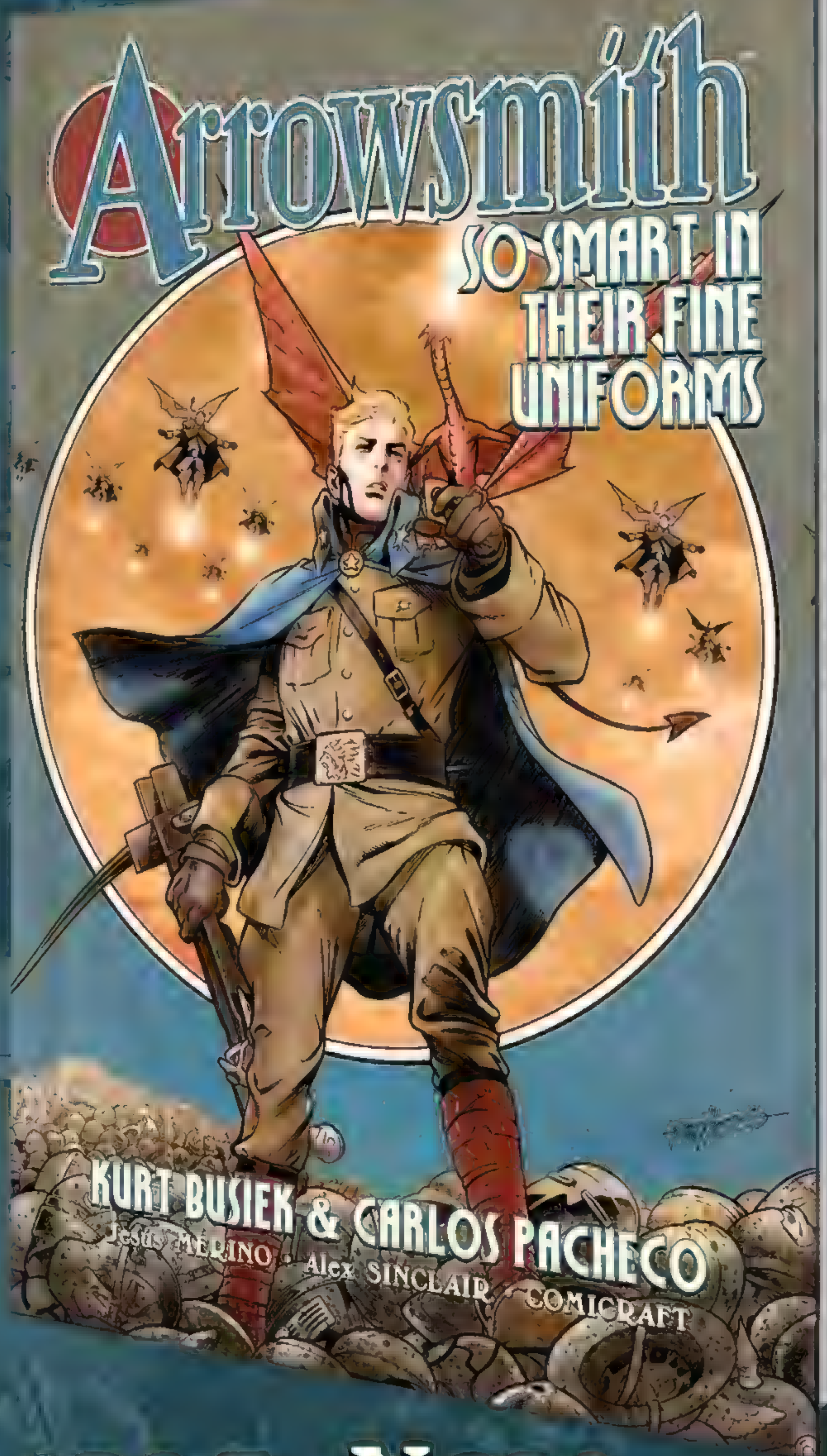
VOLUME 1

SO SMART IN THEIR
FINE UNIFORMS

THEY TAUGHT
HIM A FEW
SPELLS, ISSUED
HIM A DRAGON
AND SENT HIM
TO WAR.

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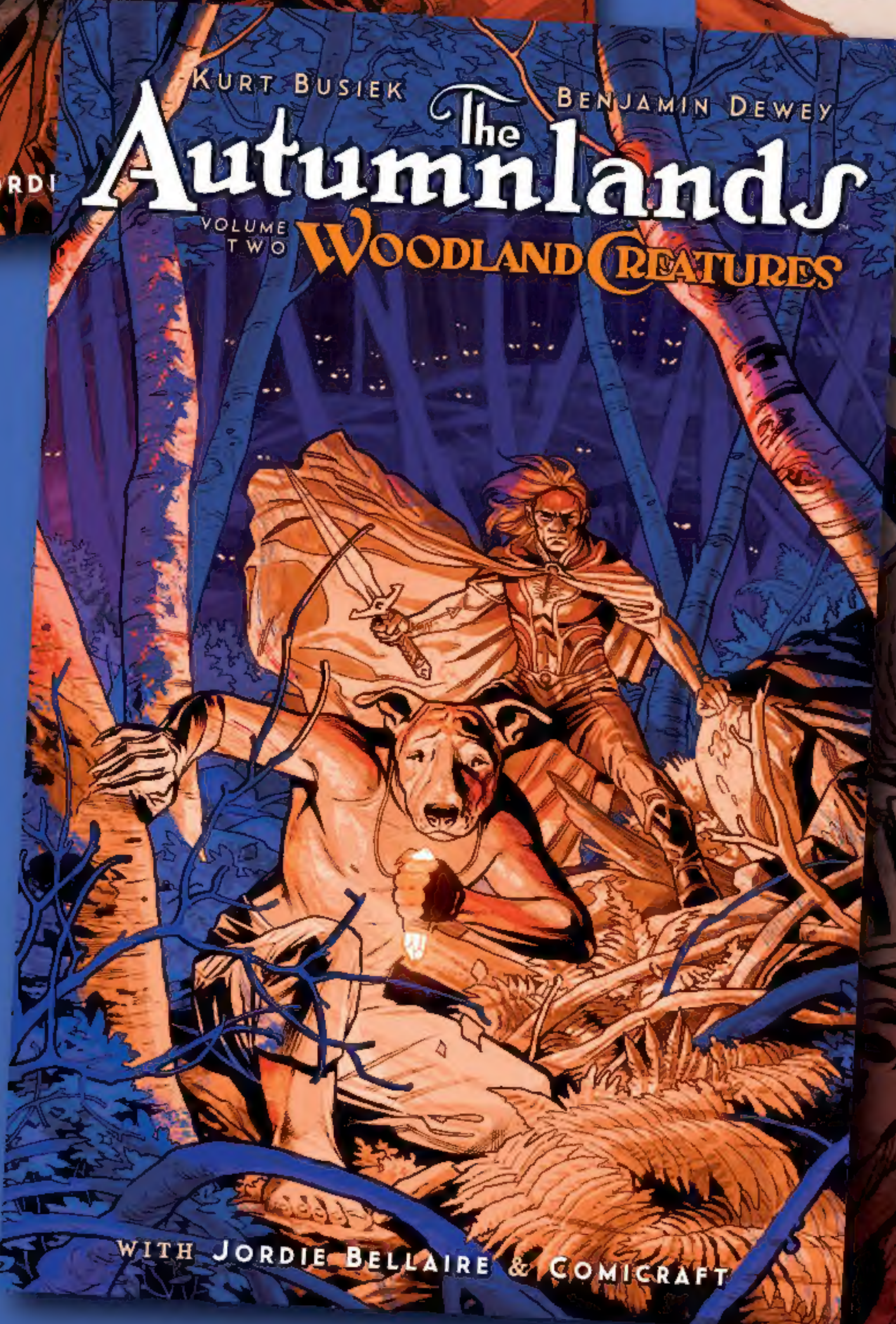
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In a world of
animals, **he** may
be the most
SAVAGE.



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ABOUT THE CREATORS

KURT BUSIEK is a New York Times bestselling and Eisner Award-winning writer of celebrated runs on Avengers, Superman and more, including the breakout hit *Marvels* (with Ross), and has co-created ARROWSMITH, AUTUMNLANDS and *Thunderbolts*, among others. He lives in the Portland Oregon area with his wife Ann and their children Dan and Kat.

BRENT ERIC ANDERSON began making his own comics in junior high school, and graduated to professional work less than a decade later. He's drawn such projects as *Ka-Zar the Savage*, *X-Men: God Loves Man Kills*, *Strikeforce: Morituri*, *Somerset Holmes*, *Rising Stars* and, of course, ASTRO CITY, for which he's won multiple Eisner and Harvey Awards. He makes his home in Northern California.

ALEX ROSS is the artist and co-creator of multiple painted projects, including *Marvels*, *Kingdom Come*, *Superman: Peace on Earth*, and *Justice*. His work outside of comics includes magazine and album covers, as well as the poster for the 2002 Academy Awards. He has also been the subject of multiple books, including *Mythology: The DC Comics Art of Alex Ross* and *Marvelocity: The Marvel Comics Art of Alex Ross*.

WILL BLYBERG first inked Brent Anderson on *Anima* for DC Comics, which led to the ASTRO CITY assignment. He's also inked such series as *Deathstroke*, *Wonder Woman* and *DNAgents*, and collects vintage radio programs.

ALEX SINCLAIR has colored virtually every character in the DC stable and many others besides. Best known for his award-winning work with Jim Lee and Scott Williams, he's graced such books as ARROWSMITH, *Batman: Hush*, *Superman: For Tomorrow*, *Wonder Woman*, *Amazing Spider-Man*, *Star Wars* and *Venom*.

STEVE BUCCELLATO is an award-winning art director and illustrator who's worked in comics as a colorist, writer, penciler and editor on series from *Batman* to *X-Men* to *The Flintstones*, including his own *Weasel Guy* and *Joey Berserk and Claire*. His latest venture is Legendhaus, combining his experiences, interests and love of story.

COMICRAFT is the award-winning design and lettering studio founded by Richard Starkings with John Roshell in 1992, famous for pioneering the process of digitally lettering comic books. Their work has appeared in comics from *Avengers* to *X-Men*, as well as television, movies, phone apps and video games. Tyler Smith is the latest designer to join the Comicraft ranks, working on comics for Blizzard, Riot! and DC Comics. He lives and works alongside Richard in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

WELCOME TO ASTRO CITY. PLEASE DRIVE CAREFULLY.



Meet a hero who dreams every night of flying. An alien spy preparing the way for an invasion. A young man mentored by a hero with dark secrets. A street criminal who discovers a hero's identity. And much more. Join acclaimed creators **KURT BUSIEK**, **BRENT ERIC ANDERSON** and **ALEX ROSS** as they take you to a metropolis like no other.

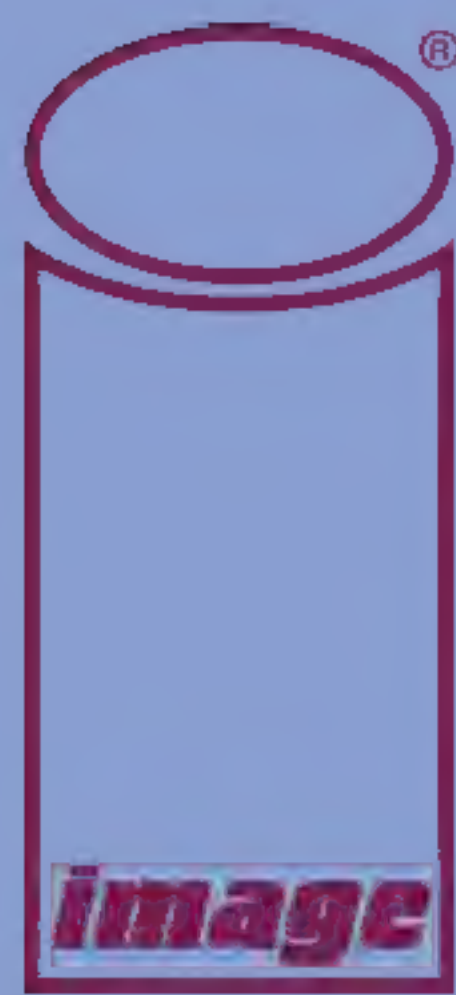
When **ASTRO CITY** debuted, it hit comics like an earthquake, revolutionizing the superhero genre and winning its creators multiple industry awards, including Best Writer and Best Series, as well as the prestigious Eisner Award for Best Single Issue three years running — all three of which are included here.

Step into a whole new world — and find out what it's like to live there.

"Calling **ASTRO CITY** a slice-of-life book in a superhero world doesn't even begin to do it justice... Busiek and company manage to draw the reader in unlike any other title I've ever read."
—*The Village Voice*

"The most interesting game in town, as far as caped crusaders are concerned."
—*The Washington Post*

"One of the most well-crafted, life-affirming, and exhilarating superhero comics in recent memory."
—*The Comics Journal*



Collects KURT BUSIEK'S **ASTRO CITY**, VOL. 1 (1-6)
& VOL. 2 (1-12), plus WIZARD PRESENTS **ASTRO CITY** ½.

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Rated **T/Teen**



SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN...
THIS MONSTER!"

